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**STANISLAVSKI'S DIRECTORS: MICHAEL CHEKHOV AND THE  
REVOLUTION IN LITHUANIAN THEATRE OF THE 1930s**

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## ABSTRACT

Michael Chekhov is considered to be one of the most talented and widely recognised students of Konstantin Stanislavski. After leaving Moscow, Chekhov was invited to share his innovative ideas on actor training with theatre circles in Lithuania. In 1932 he was employed at the then capital's State Theatre for a year, during which time he taught at the Drama Studio and directed three plays. His work in Kaunas proved to be beneficial for the development of Lithuanian theatre. To this day, the critics there remark on how he influenced some of his students, and how his productions challenged the audience's views of contemporary theatre. In terms of the English sources, Chekhov's Lithuanian period is mostly ignored. This discussion will outline how the method he taught in the Kaunas classes informed Chekhov's theories that are now associated with his name. The analysis of his three productions in Kaunas will shed some light on his early ventures as an independent director. The text will conclude with a summary of the careers of two of Chekhov's students in order to illustrate his influence on the development of theatre in Lithuania.

## CONTENTS

	Page
List of figures	4
Deffinitions and abbreviations	6
Introduction	7
<i>Chapter 1:</i>	
Michael Chekhov's Classes at the Kaunas State Theatre's Drama Studio	16
<i>Chapter 2:</i>	
Chekhov's Productions at the Kaunas State Theatre	51
<i>Chapter 3:</i>	
The Legacy of Michael Chekhov in Developing the Lithuanian Stage	90
Conclusion	110
Bibliography	114
Appendix	123

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figures 1 - 5 (pages 23, 24, 25) Illustrations for Michael Chekhov's Schemes of Creation.<sup>1</sup>

Figure 6 (page 58) A scene from Chekhov's 1932 production of William Shakespeare's *Hamlet*.<sup>2</sup>

Figure 7 (page 62) A sketch of Hamlet's costume by Mstislav Dobuzhinsky.<sup>3</sup>

Figure 8 (page 63) A portrait of Vera Solovjova-Olekienė's Queen in *Hamlet*.<sup>4</sup>

Figure 9 (page 64) A stage design for *Hamlet* by Dobuzhinsky.<sup>5</sup>

Figure 10 (page 71) A scene from Chekhov's 1933 production of William Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*.<sup>6</sup>

Figure 11 (page 73) A scene from Chekhov's 1933 production of William Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> First published in the present work. Original location: inserted in between the pages of Chekhov's Kaunas class notes, taken by Romualdas Juknevičius. "Michailas Čechovas. Pamokos – praktiniai pratimai Kauno Dramos Teatro Studijos Auklėtiniams." 18 Aug. – 29 Sept. 1932 MS. Eil. Nr. 44, A196/7, archive of Michael Chekhov, LMTMC. ["Lessons – practical exercises for the students of the Kaunas State Theatre."]

<sup>2</sup> 11 Oct. 1932, T-1.1, eil. Nr. 511/8, A1115/3, archive of Chekhov, LMTMC. Published in Audronė Girdzijauskaitė, ed. *Lietuvių Teatro Istorija*. Vol. 1. Vilnius: Gervelė, 2000, 148.

<sup>3</sup> A scanned copy from Živilė Ambrasaitė. *Mstislavas Dobužinskis: Scenografija Lietuvos Teatro, Muzikos ir Kino Muziejaus Rinkiniuose*. Vilnius: Vilniaus Dailės Akademijos Leidykla, 2006. Due to the delicate nature of the drawings the LMTMC prohibits scanning and copying. 1932. Location: Dailė (Art), Ad2157, inv. Nr. 875, archive of Dobuzhinsky/W. Shakespeare's *Hamlet*.

<sup>4</sup> 11 Oct. 1932, T-1.1, eil. Nr. 510/2, A1101/4, archive of Chekhov, LMTMC. Published in Girdzijauskaitė 1: 149.

<sup>5</sup> A scanned copy retrieved from the LMTMC database. 1932. Location: Dailė, 15/2147, 51, archive of Dobuzhinsky/W. Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. Published in Mikhail Chekhov. "Zhizn' i Vstrechi." *Literaturnoe Nasledie v Dvukh Tomakh*. Vol. 1. Ed. Knebel', M. O. Moskva: Iskusstvo, 1986.

<sup>6</sup> 14 Mar. 1933. T-1.1, eil. Nr. 535, A1942/1, archive of Chekhov, LMTMC. Published in Girdzijauskaitė 1: 159.

<sup>7</sup> 14 Mar. 1933. T-1.1, eil. Nr. 525/1, A1937/2, archive of Chekhov, LMTMC.

Figure 12 (page 77) A scene from Chekhov's 1933 production of Nikolai Gogol's *The Government Inspector*.<sup>8</sup>

Figure 13 (page 80) A scene from Chekhov's 1933 production of Nikolai Gogol's *The Government Inspector*.<sup>9</sup>

Figure 14 (page 81) A scene from Chekhov's 1933 production of Nikolai Gogol's *The Government Inspector*.<sup>10</sup>

Figure 15 (page 81) Dobuzhinsky's stage design for P.F. Sharom's 1927 production of *The Government Inspector* in Dusseldorf.<sup>11</sup>

Figure 16 (page 99) A scene from Romualdas Juknevičius's 1936 production of Herman Heijermann's *The Good Hope*.<sup>12</sup>

Figure 17 (page 106) A scene from Algirdas Jakševičius's 1938 production of Eugene O'Neill's *Marco's Millions*.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> 26 Sept. 1933. T-1.1, eil. Nr. 264/2, A2974/2, archive of Chekhov, LMTMC. Published in Girdzijauskaitė 1: 169.

<sup>9</sup> 26 Sept. 1933. T-1.1, eil. Nr. 563, A2974/3, archive of Chekhov, LMTMC. Published in Girdzijauskaitė 1: 175.

<sup>10</sup> 26 Sept. 1933. T-1.1, eil. Nr. 26, A2974/4, archive of Chekhov, LMTMC. Published in Chekhov 1: "Zhizn' i Vstrechi."

<sup>11</sup> Retrieved from <http://www.invaluable.com/auction-lot/mstislav-valerianovich-dobuzhinsky-1875-1957-stag-tbcvqzvubu-220-m-c6tl7ep3m5>.

<sup>12</sup> 19 Dec. 1936. T-2.1, eil. Nr. 110/3, A4743/8, archive of State Theatre (Klaipėda), folder for the photographs from *The Good Hope* production. [Valstybės teatras (Klaipėdos dramos). "Viltis".] First published on the cover of the programme for the premiere of the production in the Klaipėda State Theatre. 1936. TS. Eil. Nr. 401, A192/17, archive of Juknevičius, LMTMC.

<sup>13</sup> 30 Sept. 1938. T-1.1, eil. Nr. 777/3, A2966/9, archive of Jakševičius, LMTMC.

## DEFINITIONS AND ABBREVIATIONS

LMTMC Lithuanian Museum of Theatre, Music and Cinema

NLALA National Lithuanian Archives of Literature and Art

MAT Moscow Art Theatre

Second MAT Second Moscow Art Theatre (former First Studio)

Ap.; Eil. Nr.; T LMTMC archival classifications, as they appear in the databases and on the documents.

Ap.; byla NLALA archival classifications, as they appear in the catalogues and on the documents.

## INTRODUCTION

Michael Aleksandrovich Chekhov (1891-1955) was one of the most talented and innovative actors and theoreticians of his time. Having studied and worked at the First Studio of Konstantin Stanislavski's (1863-1938) Moscow Art Theatre from 1912, Chekhov has always been associated with the master and his System of actor training. In fact, Chekhov started to digress from Stanislavski's techniques while he was at the First Studio, where a lot of theatrical experimentations took place. Upon leaving Russia in 1928, Chekhov eventually exchanged acting for teaching his own method and directing. He developed his theories on theatre and the art of actor's expression while travelling across Europe and to America. The Chekhov technique became elevated as a visionary actor training method, time and again recaptured by current theatre practitioners in their own interpretations and follow-ups to his methods. To list a few, Lenard Petit, the Artistic Director of the Michael Chekhov Acting Studio in New York, wrote an informative *The Michael Chekhov Handbook: For The Actor*, in which he takes the reader through the all-important principles and aims behind the technique.<sup>14</sup> Israeli director and teacher David Zinder published *Body Voice Imagination: A Training for the Actor* (later updated as *Body Voice Imagination: ImageWork Training and the Chekhov Technique*) where his concept of the *ImageWork* captures and links with Chekhov's methodology, developing it further.<sup>15</sup> Studios specialising in teaching Chekhov's method feature in America, England (such as the Michael Chekhov Centre), and Russia (National Michael Chekhov Association). His method is brought to other countries in the form of international workshops, such as the one in Latvia in 1996, instigated by the Chekhov Society and the Moscow Art Theatre.

During Chekhov's years spent at the First Studio of the MAT in the 1920s his relationship to Stanislavski was obscured by artistic differences. Nevertheless, Chekhov's roots in the famous theatre were never completely discarded by him. In

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<sup>14</sup> Lenard Petit. *The Michael Chekhov Handbook: For The Actor*. London: Routledge, 2010.

<sup>15</sup> David Zinder. *Body Voice Imagination: A Training for the Actor*. London: Routledge, 2002 and *Body Voice Imagination: ImageWork Training and the Chekhov Technique*. 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. London: Routledge, 2009.



contrast, despite openly disagreeing with some of Stanislavski's System's most inherent principles, he never failed to display his respect for the master and the institution that exposed him to the most innovative theatrical happenings in Russia at the time. The MAT was formed in 1898 by Stanislavski and his colleague Vladimir Nemirovich-Danchenko (1858-1943), who was a talented director and playwright. It was in the First Studio of this institution, officially opened in 1912, that Stanislavski experimented and developed the method of actor training (what became known as his "System"). It was revolutionary because for the first time the art of acting was systematised according to a universal approach. Through what Stanislavski called a *psychotechnique*, the actors were given a method to organically transform, through the filters of their own personalities, into the characters they played. For him, the laws of nature that functioned in the real life were the conditions that validated the construction of all arts. Stanislavski strove for a truthful expression of the characters introduced by the playwright; he believed that sincere emotions and body language during acting would counterbalance what he called the *stock-in-trade* theatre tradition of superficial, stereotyped face expressions and other conventions. Stanislavski's System maintains that an actor's true transformation into a character is akin to living the life of that character. Throughout his artistic developments, he wanted to deliver on the stage an illusion of reality, truthful to the nature's processes and psychological intricacies of the human personalities and relationships. In his autobiographical *My Life in Art* (originally published in Moscow in 1926), Stanislavski describes his changing approaches to acting and staging various plays, involving realism, historical realism, historical naturalism, and others. Above all, however, he posits that 'realism only becomes naturalism when it is not justified by the actor from within.'<sup>16</sup> Stanislavski's realism is predominantly pertaining to nature and its processes, which resulted in the System being considered as a *naturalistic* (not naturalist as such, or merely imitating reality) approach. Claude Schumacher sums up Stanislavski's artistic disposition best when he groups him with such advocates of the Naturalism movement as André Antoine and August Strindberg, suggesting that he did 'what theatre people have always tried to do,

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<sup>16</sup> Konstantin Stanislavski. *My Life in Art*. Ed. and trans. by Benedetti, Jean. London: Routledge, 2008, 228.

namely to animate a reliable picture of *man in the world*.<sup>17</sup> The System's motivation to uncover the inner existence of man became synonymous with the MAT and the First Studio. Driven by the possibilities presented by Stanislavski's ideas, the Studio quickly became the centre for some of the most revolutionary theatrical experimentations, and the lure for the most talented and innovative artists.

As the experiments in the First Studio progressed, other methods were arising from various interpretations of the System. Stanislavski's long-term associate and director Leopold Sulerzhitsky (1872-1916), and actor and director Evgenii Vakhtangov (1883-1922), were the first entrusted to officially lead the actor training. However it was Vakhtangov, by many considered to be Stanislavski's 'disciple', who actually established the Studio by testing and applying the System to the training there.<sup>18</sup> After joining the First Studio in 1912, Chekhov became close friends with Vakhtangov and was inspired by his interpretation of Stanislavski's still developing ideas. Like Vakhtangov, Chekhov also became drawn into searching for different paths towards the ideals underlining the System and it was at that time that he started to balance on the thin line between being Stanislavski's favourite, and his adversary. After Vakhtangov died in 1922, Chekhov naturally took over the leadership of the First Studio, and oversaw it become the Second Moscow Art Theatre. While the detachment of the Studio represented a division from Stanislavski, for the actors and directors carrying on the work of the First Studio as a Second MAT it stood as a continuum of the System's organic growth.

While Chekhov, together with his colleagues at the First Studio, challenged Stanislavski's techniques, he never doubted the ideals set by the System. In fact, these artistic principles became the very basis for his artistic and philosophical searches. Throughout his career as a teacher, spanning from the days of the First Studio and to the end of his life, Chekhov's attitude approximated to that of a

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<sup>17</sup> Claude Schumacher, ed. General Introduction. *Naturalism and Symbolism in European Theatre 1850-1918*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996, 3.

<sup>18</sup> Nick Worrall, *Modernism to Realism on the Soviet Stage: Tairov – Vakhtangov – Okhlopkov*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1989, 76; Speaking in 1911, Vakhtangov declares: 'I established the Studio.' Vakhtangov expert Andrei Malaev-Babel explains that as Vakhtangov formed the curriculum for the 'regular training' at the Studio, he did indeed 'establish' it. Malaev-Babel, ed. and trans. *The Vakhtangov Sourcebook*, London: Routledge, 2011, 231.

relentless truth seeker. It was as if he saw very clearly what Stanislavski aimed to describe in his System, but knew that there are other paths to conceiving a new life of the role and having a genuine experience of its existence within the actor. Chekhov searched for an approach that did not confine the art of expression to the actors' individual personalities and the rationality of a cognitive mind. Instead, he understood artistic creativity as a spiritual experience. Developing the methods of his predecessors, especially of Vakhtangov with whom he worked closely at the Studio, and of such varied artists as symbolist Vsevolod Meyerhold (1874-1940), in his method Chekhov furthered Stanislavski's teaching that separated the conscious from the subconscious. He reduced the performer's personality to being a bystander, elevated the body to being a trained (or well-tuned, like a musical instrument) apparatus, and channelled the subconscious towards creative activity. It is the higher world of spiritual activity to which the artist is connected, Chekhov believed, and this connectivity should be the base for creative thoughts and arising images. The System's rational and analytical approach to interpreting the roles and helping the actor experience them with the aid of his/her own emotions, was replaced by an objective (subconscious) creator who controls the physical actor and fills him/her with new emotions and experiences. Unlike Stanislavski, Chekhov did not want to represent or experience reality; he wanted to evoke the spiritual processes that lay behind the reality.

In the late 1920s, Chekhov found it difficult to continue implementing his artistic ambitions at the Second MAT. He left Russia in search for more creative freedom and travelled to various countries, driven by one objective - to open his own drama school where he would create the 'new theatre'.<sup>19</sup> After some disappointments in Czechoslovakia, Germany and France, where he failed to achieve his ambition, Chekhov travelled to Latvia and Lithuania where he was provided with the possibility to direct, and, most importantly, to teach according to his own method. Therefore, in the Baltic States Chekhov was more in charge of his search for the new theatre than he had been in the previous countries he

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<sup>19</sup> For example, writing to Andrius Oleka-Žilinskas, Artistic Director of the Kaunas State Theatre and his friend, Chekhov hopes, this ambition unfortunately being in vain, that once he gets the financing the plans for his 'new theatre' can be fulfilled in Czechoslovakia. 'Когда получим деньги, будем (...) говорить о факте нашего, нового театра.' Letter to Oleka-Žilinskas, Sept. 1929, from Berlin, published in Michael Chekhov. *Literaturnoe Nasledie v Dvukh Tomakh*. Vol. 1. Ed. Knebel', M. O. Moskva: Iskusstvo, 1986. 371.

worked in. Between March and November 1932 Chekhov premiered five productions in Riga that he directed and acted in, three at the Latvian National Theatre and two at the Russian Drama Theatre. In the summer of the same year he started teaching the young Latvian actors in his method, and it was this role that earned him an invitation from the Artistic Director of the Lithuanian State Theatre. Moscow-born Andrius Oleka-Žilinskas (1893-1948), also a former First Studio student, deemed Chekhov the right person for his own plans regarding the future of Lithuanian theatre and its young actors. Having grown up in Lithuania, Oleka-Žilinskas returned there by invitation to be the first person to bring Stanislavski's teachings to actors and audiences. With no official actor training approach, the capital's Kaunas State Theatre was stagnating in the artistic and production conventions adapted during its first years of existence, in the early 1920s. Oleka-Žilinskas had a theatrical reform in mind. After he was appointed the director of the State Theatre, he decided that while he can concentrate on the management of the theatre, another artist should be invited from abroad to teach at the Drama Studio affiliated to the State Theatre. In August 1932, Chekhov started teaching there. His curriculum in Riga was utilised, with variation on the structure, in his classes in Kaunas. In parallel to his teaching, Chekhov directed three plays in Lithuania, William Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and the *Twelfth Night*, both of which he also directed in Riga, and Nikolai Gogol's *The Government Inspector*. Unlike in Riga, Chekhov did not act in any of his Kaunas productions.

While Chekhov taught and directed in Riga as he did in Kaunas, I chose to separate his time spent in Lithuania from his circumstances in Latvia on account of Chekhov's specific role in the theatres of the two countries at the time. Chekhov returned to Riga after visiting the city in 1922 during a First Studio tour and, in his own words, 'fell in love with it for the second time.'<sup>20</sup> In Riga Chekhov found the spirit of theatre that befitted the standards of Moscow, the city he'd left behind, and just the same, the audiences in Riga primarily desired Chekhov for his reputation as a renowned actor from the MAT. These circumstances suggest that Chekhov's role as director and teacher came secondary, an opinion supported by the fact that he acted in all of the productions he directed in Riga, thus maintaining his preconceived stardom. As for Kaunas, on the other hand, he was

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<sup>20</sup> '... я второй раз влюбился в нее!' Chekhov 1: "Zhizn' i Vstrechi." 245.

invited there specifically to *reform* the theatre. It was there that for the first time in his career Chekhov taught a curriculum in his technique and, in parallel to the classes, independently directed a series of plays (the first play he had directed autonomously was the *Twelfth Night* with the Habima company in 1930) without himself appearing on stage.

In contrast to the ‘theatrical city’ Chekhov believed Riga to be,<sup>21</sup> Kaunas was at the centre of a national theatre crisis. Oleka-Žilinskas was trying to improve the Lithuanian theatre and from the very beginning Chekhov was seen as an agent of change. The Artistic Director entrusted him with the pedagogy and the directing at the State Theatre. Chekhov concentrated on these commitments, seeing them as development from his role as an actor which he still had to maintain in his arrangement in Riga. He was entrusted with the aspirations for a theatrical reform by Oleka-Žilinskas, and taking an objective stand as an observer, utilised his methodology and staging ideas to educate the Lithuanian actors and theatre-going public alike. In this particular context, Chekhov’s classes and productions gained a connotation of being the driving force of Lithuanian theatre revolution of the early 1930s. Like he did in Latvia, Chekhov structured the classes to run along with the rehearsals for the productions. Every actor, student or professional, was working according to the method constructed by Chekhov, producing performances that left a clear mark in the history of Lithuanian theatre. The actors saw Chekhov’s method, understandably, as experimental; they eagerly delved into various techniques and, encouraged by the ideals presented by Chekhov, managed to, at least occasionally, transform to the effect of even the most unsympathetic of critics admitting to Chekhov’s achievements.

Unfortunately, Chekhov’s nationality encouraged various attacks from the Lithuanian press. The critics, protective of independent Lithuanian nation, were threatened by the looming Communist power. Even after the Soviet occupations in the 1940s, Chekhov was temporarily written out of the Lithuanian theatre history because of his and Oleka-Žilinskas’s achievements being treated as belonging to the bygone, bourgeois Lithuania. Today, Lithuanian theatre historians note Chekhov’s contribution to the development of Lithuanian theatre, and any new

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<sup>21</sup> ‘Рига – город театральный.’ Ibidem 247.

releases dedicate extensive or brief analyses of his productions in Kaunas. Discussions of the methodology he taught in Kaunas, however, are rare. Yet, it was the techniques and concepts presented to his students there that laid the groundwork for Chekhov's future book on the art of acting, *To the Actor* (1945; rereleased in 1953). The most recent publication on the Lithuanian theatre, edited by Audronė Girdzijauskaitė, features a chapter dedicated to Chekhov's time spent in Kaunas. However, in it his productions are discussed in detail while his classes are overlooked.<sup>22</sup> This is common among other Lithuanian theatre historians and writers on Chekhov. In fact, Chekhov left Russia to pursue an ambition of teaching his techniques, which he failed to do initially due to various, such as financial, reasons. The curriculum he presented in Lithuania (as well as in Latvia) therefore provides an insight into Chekhov's first attempts to round up and present his method.

Non-Lithuanian authors tend to ignore his Latvian/Lithuanian period almost completely, with an exception of the Finnish theatre historian and Chekhov expert Liisa Byckling.<sup>23</sup> English sources in particular tend to treat Chekhov's years in Germany, France, Latvia and Lithuania as, in the words of Mel Gordon and another theatre historian Franc Chamberlain, 'a series of "wander years"', or 'wandering'.<sup>24</sup> The former sums up Chekhov's time abroad in a short paragraph, and both Gordon and Chamberlain do not elaborate beyond a single sentence on his time in Latvia and Lithuania. I failed to find an English source that discusses any of Chekhov's three Kaunas productions, or what his teaching there covered. Considering the big public interest and controversy that his productions kindled in Lithuania, it is important to discuss them against the background of his method as it is known today, especially having in mind that the three productions were re-interpretations of what Chekhov acted in and directed in Moscow and abroad, as well as being some of his first independent directing ventures. Even more than his

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<sup>22</sup> Dovydas Judelevičius. "Michailo Čechovo Režisūra Valstybės Teatre." *Lietuvių Teatro Istorija 1929-1935*. Vol. 1. Ed. Girdzijauskaitė, Audronė. Vilnius: Gervelė, 2000. [*History of Lithuanian Theatre 1929-1935*.]

<sup>23</sup> Byckling wrote a book specifically on Chekhov's time spent abroad, extensively analysing his Lithuanian productions, and briefly discussing his classes at the Drama Studio. See *Mikhail Chekhov v Zapadnom Teatre i Kino*. Sankt Peterburg: Kikimora, Akademicheskii Proekt, 2000.

<sup>24</sup> Introduction. *Lessons for the Professional Actor*. By Michael Chekhov. Comp. Deirdre Hurst du Prey. New York: Performing Arts Journal, 1985, 16.; *Michael Chekhov*. London: Routledge, 2004, 21.

acting and directing experiences in Germany and France, Chekhov's so-called years of 'wandering' in the two Baltic States were, after all, years of vital development.

I aim to capture Chekhov's influence on the development of Lithuanian theatre by investigating how his techniques were utilised, both in terms of methodology and practice. I begin by discussing the first sixteen classes Chekhov taught after he arrived in Kaunas in Chapter 1. They were transcribed and typed up by two of his students, providing an insightful material into Chekhov's curriculum at the time and the progress of the classes. At this stage, I outline Chekhov's chief artistic and personal influences that are apparent in his Kaunas method, such as Stanislavski, Vakhtangov and Austrian born philosopher Rudolf Steiner (1861-1925). It was his links to Steiner's spiritual science of Anthroposophy that alienated Chekhov from the heavily censored and controlled Soviet Russian culture. In fact, Chekhov's work was officially removed from the curriculum of drama education establishments in the USSR after his departure in 1928, and was only re-introduced in 1969.<sup>25</sup> In this chapter, I aim to analyse the principles of his method and in turn establish Chekhov's chief artistic influences. In discussing his development on the existing techniques and theories, I intend to conclude to what extent Chekhov remained, as all First Studio graduates were often seen, affiliated to Stanislavski and to what extent he was an opponent to the System's dogma.

The chief purpose of this work is to look at Chekhov exclusively through his method and determine how valid it was in the context of a Lithuanian theatre reform of the early 1930s. By investigating the circumstances and reception of Chekhov's three productions in Kaunas in Chapter 2, the results of his teaching are revealed. The artistic validity of Chekhov's techniques is considered by discussing his decisions when interpreting the plays. The reader is informed about how the actors, both from the Studio in which Chekhov taught and the State Theatre professionals, responded to his demands, and to what extent did they accept his method. At the same time, Chapter 2 examines how his productions were received, especially by the press. Relying on articles from old Lithuanian newspapers, I reveal the harsh politically-driven attitudes that almost

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<sup>25</sup> Franc Chamberlain. "Michael Chekhov on the Technique of Acting: 'Was Don Quixote True to Life?'" Ed. Hodge, Alison. *Actor Training*. London: Routledge, 2010, 67.

singlehandedly determined Chekhov's place in the development of Lithuanian theatre for decades.

In Chapter 3, I aim to outline Chekhov's legacy in the development of Lithuanian theatre by discussing the artistic growth of his students. Analysing the methods and principles of two of Lithuania's best known theatre practitioners, Romualdas Junevičius and Algirdas Jakševičius, I succeed in directly linking them to Oleka-Žilinskas and Chekhov's ambitions of the early 1930s. In this, last, part of the work, the two young directors are conveyed as a successful continuum of the reforms outlined in the first and second chapters.



## CHAPTER I

### MICHAEL CHEKHOV'S CLASSES AT THE KAUNAS STATE THEATRE'S DRAMA STUDIO

In the posthumously published memoirs of a Latvian theatre and cinema director and Michael Chekhov's former student, Voldemar Putse (1906-1981), Chekhov is quoted to acknowledge his artistic influences in terms of clear-cut fractions. Chekhov's featured statement asserts that 60% of his method comes from Stanislavski, 20% from Meyerhold, Vakhtangov, Austrian-born actor and director Max Reinhardt and other 'cultural figures from different countries', and 20% from his own theories.<sup>26</sup> This division is ascertained by the views of modern historians. When discussing Chekhov's method according to which he taught in a conservatory in Latvia, Chekhov expert Liisa Byckling agrees with the statement, summarising Chekhov's classes as a 'continuation of Stanislavski's ideas according to his own interpretation.'<sup>27</sup> As will be shown, this interpretation was deeply rooted in Chekhov's colleague and source of artistic inspiration, Evgenii Vakhtangov, and his own progressive views on Stanislavski's method. What Chekhov's above statement lacks, however, is the obvious influence of Rudolf Steiner's spiritual science of Anthroposophy. The former was inspired by the philosophy, both in personal and professional means, since his early career. Byckling agrees that Chekhov, who was known to be involved with the philosophy since the 1910s, found in it the meaning of life, and 'partly' based his searches for new means of theatrical expression on Steiner's theories.<sup>28</sup> There is a wide-spread belief among the historians on Chekhov that, while agreeing that as a former

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<sup>26</sup> Byckling retrieved Chekhov's quote from the memoirs of V. Putse, published in the magazine *Teatr Vестнерис* in 1989; '«В моем методе 60% от Станиславского, 20% - от Мейерхольда, Вахтангова, Рейнхардта и от деятелей культуры разных стран и 20% - моего собственного».' Byckling 152.

<sup>27</sup> '[занятия Чехова] были продолжением идей системы Станиславского в его собственном истолковании.' Byckling 157.

<sup>28</sup> 'В антропософии Чехов нашел смысл и цель жизни (...) и его поиски новых средств сценического выражения были частично основаны на идеях Рудольфа Штейнера.' Byckling 33.

student of Stanislavski Chekhov was indeed fundamentally grounded in the System's approach, one of his other chief personal and artistic influences was Steiner.<sup>29</sup> Due to the severe censorship of Stalin's government in 1920s Russia, Chekhov did not elaborate on his anthroposophical interests in his public writings and theories on acting. In the classes in Kaunas as well as in Riga, Chekhov remained in the safe cocoon of being the teacher of Stanislavski's System, which was by then famous across theatres internationally. While there was no elaborated discussion of Anthroposophy in these lessons, Chekhov's techniques were nevertheless clearly reminiscent of Steiner's ideas on the spirituality of human existence. I aim to establish Chekhov's artistic influences by drawing a distinction between his assumed role as a follower of Stanislavski's ideals, and the extent to which he applied Steiner's ideas to his developing methodology in actor training, first applied in the two Baltic States. In doing so, I aim to provide an insight into his future training techniques that were published as a manual on actor training. The Russian version, *О Технике Актера*, was published in 1945, after Chekhov had moved to America. In 1952 he rewrote the book in English, with little variation on the method, and gave it the title *To the Actor: On the Technique of Acting*.<sup>30</sup>

Chekhov started teaching at the Kaunas State Theatre's Drama Studio on 18 August 1932. He was invited to continue the work of Andrius Oleka-Žilinskas, who was first to bring to Lithuania the Stanislavski System in actor training in 1929. Before that, there had been no official actor training techniques in the country. The sixteen students in Oleka-Žilinskas's Drama Studio class - the Studio was annexed to the Kaunas State Theatre - were taught the basics of the System. For the first time in Lithuania, the actors were nurtured as organic agents of nature, with creative processes as complex and demanding as those of Nature herself. 'The mystery of nature is hidden within us', read the notes from Oleka-Žilinskas's first classes in Kaunas, 'everything is given to us, apart from the answer to the

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<sup>29</sup> To illustrate, Chamberlain states that Steiner 'offered a model of the human being and of spiritual development that was useful to Chekhov, both in his personal life and in his understanding of the art of acting.' *Michael Chekhov* 13.

<sup>30</sup> Mikhail Chekhov. "O Tekhnike Aktera." *Literaturnoe Nasledie v Dvukh Tomakh*. Vol. 2. Ed. Knebel', M. O. Moskva: Iskusstvo, 1986. The English version was first published as *To the Actor: On the Technique of Acting*. New York: Harper & Row, 1953.

question: (...) how the world is created.’<sup>31</sup> Oleka-Žilinskas was concerned with the ethics and the role of theatre in the society, and had his own ideas of what Stanislavski’s quest has uncovered regarding the acting techniques. Rather than following Stanislavski’s ‘concern for naturalistic production values’,<sup>32</sup> Oleka-Žilinskas encouraged his students to aim for harmony and composition. He, like other students of the First Studio, Chekhov and Vakhtangov, saw naturalism in theatre as the antithesis of art; instead, he believed that a director’s role as the uniting force must encompass a varied combination of inner and stylistic qualities for the play to present a coherent unity.<sup>33</sup>

Fittingly to the artistic standards of Oleka-Žilinskas, Chekhov was working towards the establishment of the new, enlightened ‘actor-artist’. This type of actor, Chekhov believed, was being suffocated by naturalism, still dominant in the Russian and especially Lithuanian theatres at the time, because it was ‘not art’; because in ‘copying reality’ the artist was denied the possibility to contribute to the process of creation, to ‘add [something] of himself/herself’.<sup>34</sup> This view stems from Vakhtangov’s ardent dislike of naturalism’s damaging effect on theatre, as expressed by the artist in 1921: ‘Let naturalism in the theatre die.’ Foreshadowing Chekhov’s lifelong search for new means of expression, Vakhtangov’s own continuing search was to look, remembers his former student, Ruben Simonov, ‘for a new form that would express the life-truth in the theatre truth.’<sup>35</sup> It was with this aim that he formed Imaginative Realism (also known as Fantastic Realism), Vakhtangov’s conception of a theatre ideal, discussed below. Chekhov inherited the outlook of the artist as an objective creator (one who does not rely on his emotions) and the rejection of naturalism in favour of a *theatre truth* from Vakhtangov. It was these circumstances that particularly deemed him a

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<sup>31</sup> Notes taken by Algirdas Jakševičius, “Andrius Olekos-Žilinsko Paskaitos.” 1929-1930? MS. Eil. Nr. 111, A471, archive of Oleka-Žilinskas, Lithuanian Museum of Theatre, Music and Cinema (as of now LMTMC), Vilnius, 4. [“Lectures of Andrius Oleka-Žilinskas.”]

<sup>32</sup> Chamberlain. “Michael Chekhov on the Technique of Acting...” Hodge 63.

<sup>33</sup> Notes taken by Algirdas Jakševičius. “Andrius Olekos-Žilinsko Vaidybos Sistemos Užrašai.” 1930 MS. Eil. Nr. 107, A468, archive of Oleka-Žilinskas, LMTMC, 27a – 29a. [“Andrius Oleka-Žilinskas’s Notes on his Acting System.”]

<sup>34</sup> [Актер-художник] поймет, что натурализм не есть искусство, ибо художник ничего не может привнести от себя (...) что задача его при этом ограничивается умением более или менее точно скопировать «натуру». Chekhov 1: “Put’ Aktera.” 68.

<sup>35</sup> The latter statement by Vakhtangov expressed in a diary entry. Simonov, Ruben, *Stanislavski’s Protégé: Eugene Vakhtangov*. New York: DBS, 1969, 7, 198.

distinguished and progressive artist in the eyes of Oleka-Žilinskas. A year before Chekhov arrived in Lithuania, Oleka-Žilinskas had compared his techniques to those of Stanislavski and told the students that while Stanislavski ‘approached [acting] through experiencing’, Chekhov had said: ‘the image is not in me, but next to me, in the air, and I just accept it and release it through myself’.<sup>36</sup> Oleka-Žilinskas explained that it is because Chekhov approached the role objectively, as a stream of life outside himself, he was able to see and convey to the audiences the qualities of his character that are usually not revealed by the actors,<sup>37</sup> who filter it through their own personalities. Even though both Chekhov and Oleka-Žilinskas were marketed as representatives of Stanislavski’s teachings, they aimed to find techniques that free the performer’s expression from such subjective experiencing.

The following discussion will concentrate on the first sixteen classes taught by Chekhov that took place during the three-month rehearsals for the production of William Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* at the Kaunas State Theatre. They played the major part in the preparation of the actors for the production. The classes comprised theoretical and practical material for the *actor’s work on himself/herself*, involving a substantial amount of exercises to support a theoretical background. The techniques presented by Chekhov in this material form a base for the methods in his future actor training manuals and the curriculum he taught in Dartington Hall, Devon, and America.<sup>38</sup> Applied to young, relatively untrained actors, these methods were at a developing stage. They provide an insight into the origins of Chekhov’s methodology that are rooted in the ideals of Stanislavski, the dynamic development of his System by Vakhtangov, and the ideas of Rudolf Steiner. The following outline draws on the class notes of Romualdas Juknevičius and Algirdas Jakševičius, where the narrative of Chekhov’s comments and exercises is represented in depth and in a concise form.

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<sup>36</sup> Notes taken by Algirdas Jakševičius. “Andrius-Olekos Žilinsko Vaidybos Sistemos III Kurso Programa ir Užrašai.” 1931 MS. Eil. Nr. 108, A466/1, archive of Oleka-Žilinskas, LMTMC, 3. [“Programme and Notes from the 3<sup>rd</sup> Year of Andrius Oleka-Žilinskas Acting System.”]

<sup>37</sup> Ibidem 10. As an example, Oleka-Žilinskas describes how Chekhov played the ‘piggish’ stockbroker Frazer in the First Studio production of Johan Henning Berger’s *The Deluge* and managed to arouse feelings of compassion from the public.

<sup>38</sup> These lessons were transcribed and published by Chekhov’s assistant Deirdre Hurst du Prey, see Michael Chekhov. *Lessons for Teachers of his Acting Technique*. Ottawa: Dovehouse Editions, 2000 and *Lessons for the Professional Actor*.

Unfortunately, Chekhov's abrupt departure in September 1933 left his curriculum unfinished, lacking in the following promised stages of *working on the role*, and *directing*.<sup>39</sup> Months after Chekhov had left Kaunas for Latvia, he, asked by his Lithuanian students, sent them letters on the art of theatre. One of the letters, which includes a lecture on theatrical *atmosphere*, survives in the Lithuanian Museum of Theatre, Music and Cinema, Vilnius. The letters also laid the foundations, Chekhov explains in his autobiographical *Жизнь и Встречи (Life and Acquaintances, 1944-1945)*, for the notes that were developed into his aforementioned books on the technique of the actor.<sup>40</sup>

### CHEKHOV'S KAUNAS CLASSES: AN OVERVIEW

Chekhov begins the classes at the Drama Studio in Kaunas by alluding to the two main concerns that will dominate his curriculum in Lithuania as well as his whole career. Referring to his expectations of the new class of students, the teacher asks rhetorically, 'Will [the drama students] find here a mysterious "something"? (...) Will the new theatre be revealed here?' These expectations represent the 'future' theatre that will be spiritual, contemporary and conscientious, or in Chekhov's words, 'ideal'.<sup>41</sup> In Kaunas he does not limit his role to that of a teacher, but presents searching and exploring as the main tasks that underline his upcoming classes.

In the method Chekhov presented in Lithuania, the actor is separated in two, the inner quality providing both the fuel and the substance for the outer, physical, manifestation. The 'inner energy' is an asset of the inner 'second,

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<sup>39</sup> 'работы над собой'; 'мы приступим ко второму этапу - к работе над ролью. (...) для желающих - класс режиссерский.' Michael Chekhov. *Uroki Mikhaila Chekhova v Gosudarstvennom Teatre Litvy. 1932 god: Materialy k Kursu "Masterstvo Aktera"*. Eds. Adomaitite, A. and Guobis, A. Moskva: GITIS, 1989, 9 (6). The publication does not, bar some grammatical and sentence structures, differ from the original typescript of the classes, held at LMTMC, archive of Michael Chekhov, Eil. Nr. 43, A196/3. For authenticity purposes I will list the relevant page numbers from "Michailas Čechovas. Pamokos – Praktiniai Pratimai Kauno Dramos Teatro Studijos Auklėtiniams" in brackets.

<sup>40</sup> 'По просьбе актеров я писал им из Латвии письма о театре. Это положило начало запискам, которые позднее (...) я оформил в книгу о технике актера.' Chekhov 1: 256.

<sup>41</sup> 'Найдут ли здесь это таинственное «что-то»? (...) Откроется ли здесь новый театр?'; 'В будущем (идеальном!) театре'. Chekhov, *Uroki Mikhaila Chekhova* 5 (1), 34 (42).

spiritual actor’,<sup>42</sup> the creative force of the performer. The exercises are carried out in the classes in order for this second actor ‘to start sensing the composition in the space spiritually-physically’, and they are to be approached not by rational reasoning, but sensed with one’s soul.<sup>43</sup> As an example, the following exercise, typical of the group exercises Chekhov applied in Kaunas, nurtures a sense of space and collective, intuitive communication: the groups have to create and maintain a composition without verbal dialogue:

One part of the group of participants (...) forms a composition (...) to the theme dictated by the music. Another part of the group is waiting to join the first group without breaking up its composition (...) Yet another group of participants enters in the same way, forming a composition with the first two groups.<sup>44</sup>

It reveals the inner actor as the architect who communicates not with but through the actor’s body. The established spiritual connection allows the performer to develop an organic composition with the stage space and the fellow actors. The training of the second inner actor is vital if the performer is to liberate the inner energy to the body; therefore this part of the actor must be as versatile as the physical one.<sup>45</sup> Only when the second actor becomes strong enough to control the physical will, and not be controlled by it, will the actor’s expression be a result of a spiritual communication, instead of a rational and typified daily behaviour.

The separate roles of the actor’s inner, conscious (rational) and physical aspects supplement Chekhov’s approach to human being as a being of tripartite structure. After distinguishing between the body, soul and spirit, the physical body is defined as the ‘personality’, and the invisible soul and spirit are grouped into ‘individuality’.<sup>46</sup> Personality, charisma and overall artistry all depend on the

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<sup>42</sup> ‘это достояние нашего второго, духовного актера.’ Ibidem 10 (7).

<sup>43</sup> ‘Все выполняемые нами ныне упражнения проделываются ради того, чтобы «второй актер» стал душевно-физически ощущать композицию в пространстве.’; ‘их постигать не рассудком, а душой (ощущать, чувствовать).’ Ibidem 13 – 14 (13 – 14).

<sup>44</sup> ‘Одна часть группы участников (...) составляет композицию (...) на диктуемую музыкой тему. Другая часть участников стоит в ожидании войти в первую группу, не нарушая ее композиции (...) Еще часть участников входит таким же образом, составляя композицию с двумя первыми группами’. Ibidem 15 – 16 (17).

<sup>45</sup> ‘[актер должен внутреннего актера] так вытренировать и заставить его быть таким подвижным, как наш внешний актер.’ Ibidem 15 (16).

<sup>46</sup> Terms ‘personality’ and ‘individuality’ are direct translations from Chekhov’s Russian terms as they best reflect his methodology at the time. The terms distinguish between the conscious self, or the everyday personality, and the unconscious self, the being within oneself unaffected by the social norms. In his book *To the Actor*, Chekhov refers to ‘individuality’ as ‘creative individuality’, while ‘personality’ is explained as the

extent to which the soul and spirit materialises, as the body is employed to express ‘the individuality which lives through the visible human being.’<sup>47</sup> An artist’s body as the manifestation of the inner processes is fundamental to Chekhov’s theory of creation, which in Kaunas was divided into three stages. These stages are illustrated in five *schemes* and the corresponding drawings attached in the handwritten manuscript of the lessons.

Figure 1 (below) depicts the First Scheme where the individuality, represented by a blue star, oversees the earthly personality (depicted by the red line below). While this basic structure applies to any ordinary person, Figure 2 (below) distinguishes artists in particular, depicting white spots hovering above the star as communications to the world of creative images.<sup>48</sup> The corresponding Second Scheme outlines the first phase in the process of creation which takes place when ‘the artist hears sounds from the world of images’ and ‘feels an urge to create something. [...] The nature of his/her future creation is revealed.’<sup>49</sup> For the artist to be able to receive a communication from the above, his/her personality must be ready (of focused concentration) to capture and adapt to what is sent from there. The physical actor must develop a technique that is specially modified for transmitting that communication,<sup>50</sup> depicted in the drawing by the extended vertical line (fig. 2).

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physical body, the ‘building material’ for the creative individuality, Chekhov 2002: 85 – 87; ‘гипотезу о трехчленном человеке, имеющем видимое тело, душу и дух. (...) телесного человека условимся называть личностью. (...) не различая пока духа от души, назовем индивидуальностью.’ Chekhov, *Uroki Mikhaila Chekhova* 22 (26).

<sup>47</sup> ‘Личность же берет на себя роль выразителя той индивидуальности, которая живет через видимого человека.’ Chekhov, *Uroki Mikhaila Chekhova* 22 (26).

<sup>48</sup> By the ‘world of creative images’ Chekhov alludes to an outer world, the spiritual existence and processes beyond their physical manifestations that surround the earthly existence, just as the visible nature is in fact an expression of the universal laws that govern it. It is the origin of creativity and inspiration. Chekhov also refers to this outer world as the ‘world of images’ and ‘world of creation’. ‘Художник же тем и отличается от обычного человека, что его индивидуальность находит (...) ходы в мир творческих образов, которые витают над его индивидуальностью’. Ibidem 23 (26 – 27).

<sup>49</sup> ‘Когда художник слышит звуки из мира образов, он ощущает желание что-то сотворить.’; ‘вскрывается характер будущего произведения.’ Ibidem 23 (26 – 27).

<sup>50</sup> ‘в это время должна идти подготовка личности в общей технике. [...] Эта линия - общая техника (...) актера.’ Ibidem 23 – 24 (27).

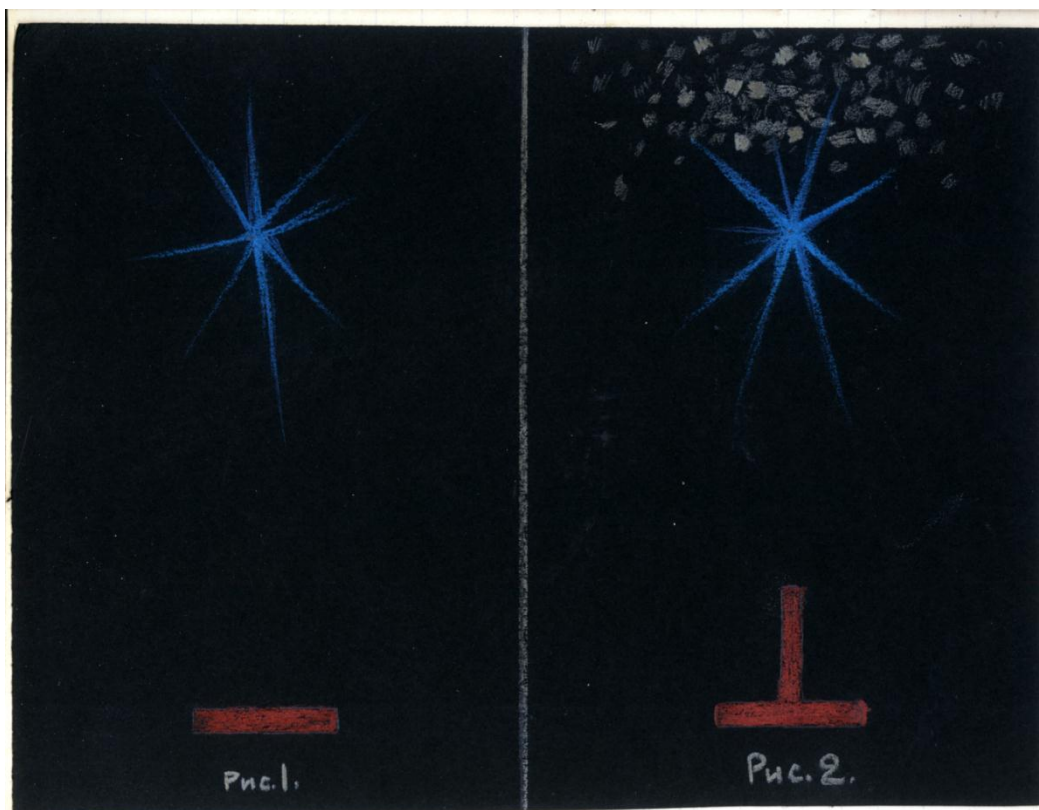


Figure 1.

Figure 2.

The second phase of creation follows with the individuality seeking specific material forms, responsive to the sounds communicated from the above (illustrated by the congregation of white spots in the Third Scheme, see fig. 3, below).<sup>51</sup> During this phase the theme is revealed to the actor as he enters the stage with an inspired wish to play the role,<sup>52</sup> the body responding accordingly to the inspiration. The curved line in the drawing represents the body as it adapts to receive the images unconsciously formulated by the actor's soul and spirit, and its goblet shape denotes its readiness to be 'filled' with them,<sup>53</sup> thus embodying them. When the 'completely ripened theme fills the [body] vessel' in the third stage and Fourth Scheme (fig. 4, below), the blue dots among the white ones reveal that the 'creation that has poured into the body carries in itself signs of (...)

<sup>51</sup> 'индивидуальность ищет формы на те звуки, которые слышит из творческого мира'. Ibidem 24 (27).

<sup>52</sup> 'художник узнает тему будущего произведения. [...] актеры идут на сцену - у них появляется желание сыграть роль.' Ibidem 24 (27 – 28).

<sup>53</sup> 'пока индивидуальность оформляет мечты (...) личность (...) подготавливает (...) себя, чтобы принять их.' Ibidem 24 (28).



the individuality.<sup>54</sup> Chekhov declares the theme to be ‘incarnated’,<sup>55</sup> concluding the process of creation as a physical imitation of an independent life that is conceived outside the actor, and matured objectively by his/her soul and spirit.

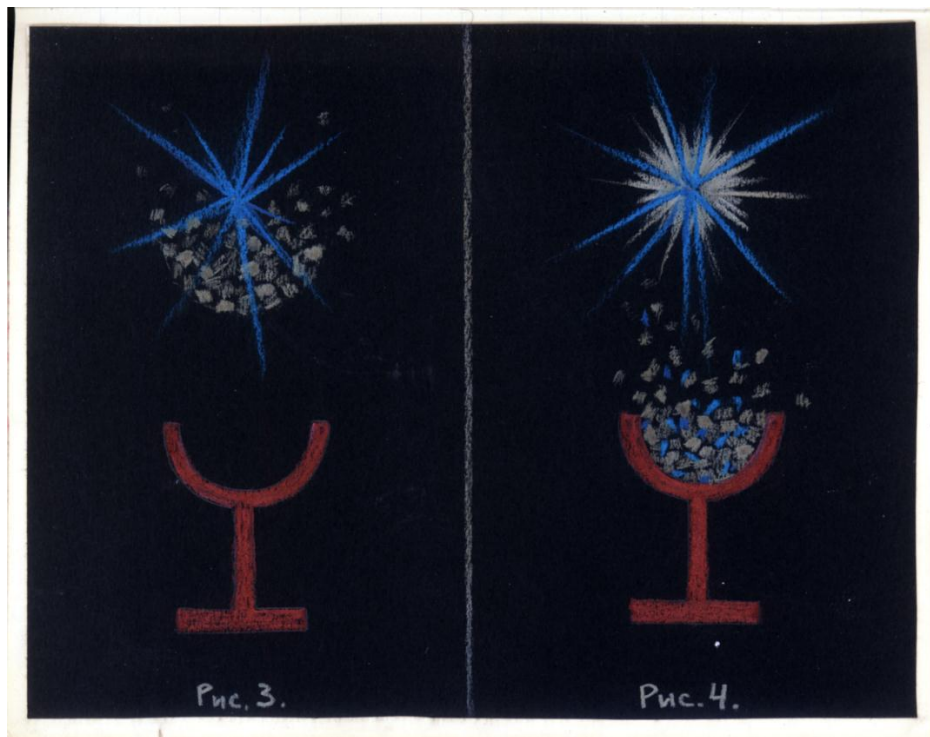


Figure 3.

Figure 4.

The aftermath of the creation process is depicted in the Fifth Scheme (fig. 5, below) where the white halo around the star of individuality reflects how it changes and is enriched with whatever has passed through it. Accordingly, the physical personality also remains with a trace of the process, illustrated by the white and blue aureole around the red curve.<sup>56</sup> The five schemes describe the release, in the form of a physical projection, of the life streams that originate outside the rational, earthly life. For Chekhov, the actor becomes a conduit between the audience and the communications from the world of creation, and with every such imitation s/he is spiritually enriched. In the book *To The Actor*, which comprises Chekhov’s experience as an actor and a theoretician, the

<sup>54</sup> ‘окончательно назревшая тема вливается и заполняет сосуд’; ‘вылившееся в сосуд творение несет в себе особенности (признаки) нашей индивидуальности.’ Ibidem 25 (28).

<sup>55</sup> ‘Тема воплощена.’ Ibidem 25 (28).

<sup>56</sup> ‘Индивидуальность после каждого творческого процесса меняется и вместе с тем обогащается тем, что сквозь себя пропустила. (...) Личность приобретает оттенок того, что сквозь себя пропустила.’ Ibidem 25 (29).

tripartite structure, as well as that of the Schemes of Creation, remain the basis of his method. Referred to as ‘higher-level I’ - or ‘creative individuality’ -, the ‘everyday “I”’ (consciousness), and the physical body, the three participate in creation. The first moulds the ‘building material’ and the second controls the ‘canvas upon which the creative individuality draws its designs’ (both referring to the body instrument).<sup>57</sup>



Figure 5.

When discussing Chekhov’s curriculum from when he taught simultaneously at a conservatoire in Riga, Byckling’s summary of the Riga classes reveals an extended version of Chekhov’s theory of creation introduced in Kaunas. The process was presented to the Latvian students in seven rather than three stages. Describing a corresponding development to the one featured in the five schemes, the seven stages commence with the image being born in the subconscious, followed by the actor’s physical preparation in order to get closer to the image in the fourth stage, and finally the full transfer of the image onto the actor in the

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<sup>57</sup> Chekhov here also includes the ‘third consciousness’ of the actor, the independent “I” of the character, which supplements his approach to the role as an outside being. See Chekhov 2002: 87 – 91.

seventh and final stage.<sup>58</sup> Having applied this theory in two drama schools, it is apparent that Chekhov's method was following a clear direction by the time he arrived to Kaunas.

## THE ORIGINS OF CHEKHOV'S METHODOLOGY: KONSTANTIN STANISLAVSKI

Chekhov's assistant Viktor Gromov believes that the talented and conscientious leaders of the First Studio, where most of Chekhov's training took place, have defined Chekhov's future method by their own innovative interpretation and mastering of the Stanislavski System. Gromov believes that it is due to the artistic upbringing of Evgenii Vakhtangov and Leopold Sulzerzhitsky that Chekhov 'remained all his life a true and devoted (...) pupil' of Stanislavski.<sup>59</sup> After the Studio became an independent theatre, Chekhov, together with other members, also sought to develop different methods based on the fundamentals promoted by Stanislavski. Maria O. Knebel', who attended Chekhov's home workshops which he ran in 1918 - 1921 in Moscow, states that even though the art towards which Stanislavski was striving was also 'Chekhov's ideal', they have taken different paths to reach it.<sup>60</sup> She remembers Stanislavski uttering his famous declaration to the young students of Chekhov's home studio: "If you want to master my system, observe the creativity of Misha Chekhov..."<sup>61</sup> For Chekhov, Stanislavski's method widened the horizons to the heights of artistic expression, and with the help of his talent and laborious work he gained a firm grip over it in his performances. So firm, that he felt limited by the dogma of the System, and experimented in the First Studio in techniques that often opposed the artistic

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<sup>58</sup> '«(...) в сверхсознании рождается жизнь нашего образа». (...) В четвертом периоде происходит взаимное приспособление (...) В (...) седьмом периоде (...) образ из мира фантазии переходит в актера.' Бусклинг 155.

<sup>59</sup> 'высокий моральный авторитет Сулержицкого; острый талант Вахтангова (...) которые жадно усваивали «систему» (...) все это [определило] дальнейшее творчество [Чехова].' '(...) на всю жизнь [Чехов] остался верным и преданным (...) учеником великого реформатора сцены.' Viktor Gromov. *Mikhail Chekhov*. Moskva: Iskusstvo, 1970, 20 – 21.

<sup>60</sup> 'Искусство, к которому стремился Станиславский, было идеалом Чехова. Но в путях, которые к этому искусству вели, они разошлись.' Maria O. Knebel'. "Mikhail Chekhov ob Akterskom Iskusstve." Chekhov 2: 10.

<sup>61</sup> '«Если хотите изучать мою систему, наблюдайте за творчеством Миши Чехова...»' Knebel', "O Mikhaile Chekhove i ego Tvorcheskom Nasledii." Chekhov 1: 33.

disposition of the MAT. As mentioned above, Chekhov rejected the naturalism that dominated the performances at the MAT and was strongly inclined towards the expressive ideas of Vakhtangov. The latter became one of Chekhov's major artistic influences, which was revealed by Chekhov himself in the admission that he 'learned a lot from Vakhtangov.'<sup>62</sup> Wanting to discover what was still hidden beyond the System, Chekhov in fact took over from Stanislavski in his life-long search for the new ways towards an artistic ideal of acting technique.

The fundamental condition for Stanislavski's System was 'to induce an actor's subconscious creative powers through a conscious psychotechnique.'<sup>63</sup> The essence of the actor's art is seen as that of truthful experiencing of the role, of *living the life* of the character. According to Stanislavski's graph of the "System", the following three elements comprise the major foundations of acting: 1) the inner and outer action, 2) Pushkin's aphorism, "The truth of passions, and the credibility of feelings in the given circumstances", and 3) the aforementioned conditioning of the subconscious through the conscious.<sup>64</sup> These motivate Stanislavski's methods of inner *experiencing* of the role and subsequent outer *embodiment*, the two processes upon which his System is based. As the actor is acquainted with the new role, the three mental drives - intelligence, will and feeling - become impregnated with it, and urge him/her to create. The actor's 'elements', such as the imagination and the sense of truth, exist interdependently in the mind of the actor along with the mental drives. As the drives, advocated by the actor's consciousness and penetrated by the role, progress deep into the actor's personality, they take on the 'colours' of his/her personal 'elements'. For example the will of a character, inhabited by the actor, will also echo his/her own imagination. As they merge, these 'elements' also become absorbed by the learned 'elements' of the play and the character, and the actor's personality

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<sup>62</sup> 'Я многому научился от Вахтангова.' "Zhizn' i Vstrechi." Chekhov 1: 171.

<sup>63</sup> Konstantin Stanislavski. *An Actor's Work: A Student's Diary*. Trans. and ed. by Benedetti, J. London: Routledge, 2010, 329.

<sup>64</sup> In the 1955 Russian version of Stanislavski's *Работа Актера над Собой (An Actor's Work)* the editor's footnotes provide the full phrase from Pushkin's article "О Народной драме и драме «Марфа Посадница»", which is as follows "Истина страстей, правдоподобие чувствований в предполагаемых обстоятельствах - вот чего требует наш ум от драматического писателя". (i.e. "The truth of passions, the credibility of feelings in the given circumstances - that's what our intellect demands from a dramatist".) Konstantin S. Stanislavskii. *Sobranie Sochinenii v Vos'mi Tomakh*. Vol. 3. Eds. M.N. Kedrov et al. Moskva: Iskusstvo, 1955, 487; Stanislavski 2010: 582.

becomes consumed by the role. Consequently, the subconscious becomes permeated with the role and instigates creativity, expressions and movements, specific to the actor *as* that role. The result is what Stanislavski refers to as the ‘inner creative state’.<sup>65</sup>

When this inner state is accomplished, the process of physical embodiment, or the ‘outer creative state’, is commenced. As the inner and outer states unite, they bring forth the ‘through-action’, which is the overall path laid out by the mind, will and creative feeling of the actor as the character.<sup>66</sup> The creative strength of the through-action is directly dependent on a ‘compelling Supertask’, referring to the thoughts of the author throughout the play.<sup>67</sup> These thoughts act like a score that guides and motivates the actor’s psychological and outer development of the role. The actor’s drives and ‘elements’ become stimulated by the pursuit of the Supertasks. As the performer’s inner and outer actions are consumed by the role, s/he lives the life of that role.

From his early career Chekhov decided that the inner content that generates the outer form and actions should not rely on an actor’s emotional involvement. In a letter to V.A. Podgornyi, he compares his and Stanislavski’s methods following a meeting between the two in 1928 with a criticism of the experiencing method of the System: ‘It seems to me that there are many moments in Stanislavski when the actor is forced (...) to extract from himself *personal* feelings - this is difficult, agonizing’.<sup>68</sup> Reflecting on his own schemes, where the role is developed objectively, in the outer spiritual world, rather than from within the actor’s personality, Chekhov adds: ‘Poor is the little soul of any person in comparison to those images that the world of fantastical images [world of creative images] sometimes sends.’ Indeed, Chekhov’s schemes of creation outline how, like in Stanislavski, the actor’s conscious preparation validates him/her as an instrument onto which an image of subconscious origin is manifested. However, in

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<sup>65</sup> For an outline of the ‘general creative state in performance’ see Stanislavski 2010: 582 – 583.

<sup>66</sup> Ibidem 312.

<sup>67</sup> Ibidem 336.

<sup>68</sup> ‘У К.С. есть, как мне кажется, много моментов, когда актер принуждается (...) к выдавливанию из себя *личных* чувств - это трудно, мучительно’; ‘Небогата душонка всякого человека в сравнении с теми образами, которые посылает иногда мир фантастических образов.’ Letter dated ‘no later than 19/09/1928’, Berlin, published in Chekhov 1: 352 – 353.

Chekhov's method that image originates outside rather than within the actor.<sup>69</sup> Stanislavski's concept of Emotion Memory [EM], which an actor accesses to fuel his/her creativity, is a fundamental part of the process of experiencing.<sup>70</sup> Applied to the 'memory of feelings', it describes a store in the mind of an actor which is accessed to withdraw some of his/her past personal feelings for the development and embodiment of a role. It is inevitable, therefore, that due to his idea of creation Chekhov categorically rejected EM in favour of feelings that are not actor's own, but belong to an independent image matured in the subconscious. Critics like Chamberlain support this by noting that as a former pupil of the First Studio Chekhov based (and transformed) aspects of his method on certain principles of Stanislavski (such as the importance of truthfulness in expression, and imagination), but from the start rejected his 'emphasis on memory.'<sup>71</sup> This decision was fundamental for Chekhov's distinctive technique, in which Stanislavski's experiencing of a role was replaced by imitating its life as conceived outside the actor's personality.

The imitation of an objective image in fact stems from Vakhtangov's approach to an actor's relationship to the image conceived in his/her imagination. Speaking at rehearsals in 1913, Vakhtangov requested the actors to 'describe some of the characters as if they stood before [them]',<sup>72</sup> objectively. In support, Knebel' has confirmed a link between Chekhov's process of imitation and Vakhtangov's notion of an actor and a conceived image.<sup>73</sup> Departing from Stanislavski's view that an actor should psychologically become one with the character s/he is playing, Vakhtangov, and subsequently Chekhov, instead emphasised the importance of imagination<sup>74</sup> as the origin of an inspiration that allows the development of an image in an emotionally detached way. In fact, imagination was so important to Vakhtangov that he created the term Imaginative

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<sup>69</sup> This has also been stated by Knebel': 'Станиславский уверен, что образы возникают «внутри нас», Чехов считает, что они существуют вне нас.' "О Mikhaile Chekhove i ego Tvorcheskom Nasledii." Chekhov 1: 16.

<sup>70</sup> The concept is based on Théodule Ribot's "affective memory", Stanislavski 2010: 197 – 198.

<sup>71</sup> Chamberlain 10.

<sup>72</sup> Malaev-Babel 245.

<sup>73</sup> '[I]t seems to me that Chekhov's "imitation" is developed on Vakhtangov's thoughts on the actor's relationship to an image.' '[M]не кажется, что «имитация» Чехова развивает мысли Вахтангова об отношении актера к образу.' Кнебел', "О Mikhaile Chekhove i ego Tvorcheskom Nasledii." Chekhov 1: 38.

<sup>74</sup> Simonov suggests that Vakhtangov 'emphasis[ed] the significance of the artist's fantasy (...) in the creative process'. Simonov 147.

Realism to describe realism that allows maximal participation of the artist's fantasy in his/her expression.

During his classes in Kaunas, Chekhov emphasised imagination as a detached and impersonal sphere of an actor's mind. During the second stage of creation, outlined in the Third Scheme, Chekhov notes that before a received image can be physically adapted, the artist must clearly perceive and cultivate it, "play" it in the sphere of fantasy.<sup>75</sup> The correct imitation of the images depends on responsive imagination. This technique is rooted in Stanislavski's view that imagination incites inner and outer action and 'takes the initiative in the creative process' of an actor.<sup>76</sup> However, in the System imagination is utilised by the rational development of 'magic "ifs"' and 'Given Circumstances', which refer to the facts made up by the author and which lift 'the actor out of everyday life into the world of the *imagination*.'<sup>77</sup> By immersing his/her personality in the facts and circumstances of the role, the actor lives the life of the character and reaches the fundament of experiencing. Remarking on the aforementioned meeting between him and Stanislavski in his autobiographical *Жизнь и Встречи*, Chekhov explains his opposition to the actor personifying the role as himself/herself, because 'truly creative feelings are achieved through fantasy (...), the less the actor touches his personal experiences, the more he creates.'<sup>78</sup> In Kaunas, Chekhov saw imagination like it was seen by Vakhtangov, as an area of the actor's consciousness in which the image, conceived in the subconscious, matures as an objective life for the actor to observe and imitate. In his future book *To The Actor* Chekhov will continue highlighting the independence of imagination by terming the 'world of creation', the spiritual origin of the images, as *Creative Imagination*.<sup>79</sup>

Chekhov's Kaunas notes confirm that a developed imagination which enables the actor to "catch" and coherently see the images brings forth confidence in the

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<sup>75</sup> 'Прежде чем художник их оформит телесно (...) он должен точно увидеть этот образ, воспринять, зафиксировать (...) «сыграть» его в области фантазии.' Chekhov, *Uroki Mikhaila Chekhova* 27 (32).

<sup>76</sup> Stanislavski 2010: 63 – 65.

<sup>77</sup> Ibidem 61.

<sup>78</sup> 'истинно творческие чувства достигаются через *фантазию* (...), чем меньше актер затрагивает свои *личные* переживания, тем больше он *творит*.' Chekhov 1: 184.

<sup>79</sup> See Chekhov 2002: 22.

all-important second, inner actor.<sup>80</sup> The ability to separate inner movements from the physical ones are here explained in terms of the inner actor's developed mastery over the outer. Chekhov states that in the process of the imitation of the images that originate in the world of creation, the 'actor must know his/her [outer] body (...) like an alphabet', so s/he would be highly responsive to the development of these images.<sup>81</sup> Indeed, in *An Actor Prepares*, Stanislavski demands a similar approach: 'Develop your body and subordinate it to the inner creative commands nature gives.'<sup>82</sup> However, unlike Stanislavski's premeditated use of the actor's Emotion Memory and carefully constructed experiencing, or *living*, the life of the role, Chekhov's treatment of the body as an instrument is wholly founded on its submission to the subconscious impulses (such as the sounds from the world of creation). Overall, however, his subjugation of the body as a device for the inner techniques supports Byckling's view that Chekhov's method could be built only on the *basis* of Stanislavski's System.<sup>83</sup>

The idea that physical form of the actor should be the result of an intuitive, rather than a rational, process stems from Vakhtangov's ideas on imagination and its creative impulses. Speaking of the actors' physical form, the director declares that they should only be transformed 'by the power of their inner impulse.'<sup>84</sup> Vakhtangov, unhappy with the lack of attention to the 'physical expressiveness of an actor' at the MAT, believed that with the help of the artist's imagination, the 'maximal expressiveness' of form can be attained, giving 'to the author's work a true reality on the stage.'<sup>85</sup> This defines Imaginative Realism, Vakhtangov's theatrical alternative to the naturalistically inclined realism practiced at the MAT. Naming the denotement of the term as the content being 'in harmony with form', the director states that Chekhov's Khlestakov in the 1921 production of *The Government Inspector* (directed by Vakhtangov) was 'treated in the method of

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<sup>80</sup> 'Развивайте свою фантазию, способность уловить и точно увидеть пойманные вами образы (...) Эта способность (...) воспитывает в вас уверенность (...) в нашем внутреннем, втором актере.'; The exercise involving inner energy and its mastery over the outer: 'по всему телу текучая энергия (...) «Двигайтесь» (внутренне!) (...) присоедините (...) ваше тело. (...) Чтобы внутренний актер был господином внешнего'. Chekhov, *Uroki Mikhaila Chekhova* 30 (35), 15 (16).

<sup>81</sup> '(...) актер должен знать свое тело (...) как азбуку.' Ibidem 29 (35).

<sup>82</sup> Stanislavski 2010: 353.

<sup>83</sup> 'важна историческая последовательность: метод Чехова мог появиться только на основе системы Станиславского.' [Italics – J.K.] Byckling 27.

<sup>84</sup> Malaev-Babel 211.

<sup>85</sup> Simonov 129, 146 – 147.



fantastic [Imaginative] realism.’<sup>86</sup> Chekhov had grasped Vakhtangov’s idealistic view of theatre as an actor, and in his own theories on the process of creation propagated the harmony between the actor’s subconscious impulses and the corresponding plastic forms; or in Chekhov’s own words, the body responsive to the demands of the second, inner, actor.

Chekhov’s model of artistic attention, presented in Kaunas, is indicative of the acute physical responsiveness to the inner commands. This method describes the actor’s ability to receive the images that may surface in his/her imagination ‘at any given moment’, at the stand-by “get ready” command.<sup>87</sup> Chamberlain refers to such bodily sensitivity to ‘inner impulses’ as a ‘process of sensitisation.’<sup>88</sup> Chekhov’s concept of artistic attention compares well to director and theatre anthropologist Eugenio Barba when he explains Chekhov’s almost ‘puppet-like’ acting as composed according to a ‘clear, artificial and premeditated design’.<sup>89</sup> He explains this appearance as partly due to the actors’ scenic presence, which depends on his/her ‘pre-expressive level’. It describes the modelling of ones actions (such as diction, tonality and intensity) forming ‘the quality of [the actors’] scenic existence.’ By artistic attention Chekhov demands physical preparation on a similar level, one that puts all the body processes on standby, down to the miniscule manifestations such as diction and the trembling of a finger. This again refers to the ‘maximal artistic expression’ that Vakhtangov demanded in order to achieve Imaginative Realism. In discussing Vakhtangov’s 1918 production of Maurice Maeterlinck’s *The Miracle of St. Anthony*, Simonov recalls the director’s attention to the plasticity of the actors: ‘distinct moulding of the body, when each movement (...) and each glance has a particular significance.’<sup>90</sup> Chekhov’s treatment of the body as an ‘instrument’, which heeds to the inner demands,<sup>91</sup> is overall rooted in Stanislavski’s fundamental condition for an actor’s transformation. Nevertheless, Chekhov’s elaborated attention to thoroughly

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<sup>86</sup> Malaev-Babel 157 – 158.

<sup>87</sup> ‘в любой момент поймать (...) образ, возникающий в нашей фантазии’; ‘команда «приготовились», с коего времени участники ожидают’. Chekhov, *Uroki Mikhaila Chekhova* 30 – 31.

<sup>88</sup> Chamberlain. “Michael Chekhov on the Technique of Acting...” Hodge 70.

<sup>89</sup> Eugenio Barba. *The Paper Canoe: A Guide to Theatre Anthropology*. London: Routledge, 1995, 103 – 105.

<sup>90</sup> Simonov 91.

<sup>91</sup> ‘[я] должен владеть инструментом.’ Chekhov. “Zagadka Tvorchestva”, published in *Красная газета*, 21 Nov. 1926, in Chekhov 2: 83; Chekhov 1: 214 – 215.

expressive outward technique indicates Vakhtangov's Imaginative Realism as the direction he chose to follow.

Twenty years later, Chekhov opens the volume *To The Actor* with a confirmation that the only way for an actor to utilise his body potential is to retract it from the materialistic environment and motivate it only by inner impulses, i.e. it 'must be moulded and re-created from *inside*.'<sup>92</sup> Literature and theatre historians Peter Malekin and Ralph Yarrow therefore categorise Chekhov and Stanislavski, together with Vsevolod Meyerhold and Englishman Gordon E. Craig, as the theatre practitioners who carried on the trend started by the early twentieth-century dance and mime artists, and 'began to see the body as the channel for 'spiritual' expression', in the fundamental 'neutral' state.<sup>93</sup> The crucial difference is, however, that Stanislavski saw the body instrument as a means to display an actor's life-like transformation into a character. For Chekhov, Meyerhold and Craig, on the other hand, the physical instrument of an actor presented the means to detach from the daily behaviour, and outline a creative interpretation of what lies beyond reality.

The neutral state is a requirement in Chekhov's, like in Stanislavski's, technique for the development of the body as a transmitter, which radiates out the inner impulses. This action is central to both the masters' demands for uninterrupted communication and orientation onstage among the actors. During one of the exercises in Kaunas, Chekhov tells his students to radiate through their hands the inner light 'that is centred in the chest'.<sup>94</sup> This echoes Stanislavski's method of communication onstage termed as 'emitting and receiving rays' among the actors.<sup>95</sup> Radiation sets the foundations for a harmonic ensemble, which was the chief goal of Chekhov's group exercises during the Kaunas classes.<sup>96</sup> Developing further on Stanislavski's communication and concentration ideas, Chekhov adapted some constructivist concepts regarding the space that surrounds the interacting actors. In the notes from the Kaunas classes Chekhov treats the

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<sup>92</sup> Chekhov 2002: 3.

<sup>93</sup> See Peter Malekin and Ralph Yarrow. *Consciousness, Literature and Theatre: Theory and Beyond*. Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1997, 134.

<sup>94</sup> 'излучайте [руками] свет, центр которого находится в груди.' Chekhov, *Uroki Mikhaila Chekhova* 27 (32).

<sup>95</sup> Stanislavski 2010: 246.

<sup>96</sup> See exercise on collective composition on p. 21.

stage as more than a location, but as a transcendental space with which the actors can create a composition like a sculptor with clay. In one of his exercises, the theme is dictated by music, arousing the intuitive impulses of the actors by stimulating their imagination, and the participants are told to occupy and sense all the space around them.<sup>97</sup> This utilising of space as one of the materials for the overall composition stems from the more physical mediums, such as dance, and especially Vsevolod Meyerhold's formalist ideas on stage movement that have been drawn from the medium. Meyerhold speaks of the actor's body being as 'malleable as wax', due to 'his regard for the law of (...) 'partire di terreno'', which 'concerns the dancer's ability to judge the area in which the dance is being performed and adjust his steps accordingly.'<sup>98</sup> In 1928, before his departure from Russia, Chekhov maintained that 'the feel for stage space is not (...) familiar to the actor' as s/he 'has not yet learned to "draw" with his/her body (...) in the stage space.'<sup>99</sup> The lacking concern for the actor's form and composition in Stanislavski's technique was not sufficient for all of Chekhov's theatrical ambitions. He continued exploring the form of the actor's movement in the stage space throughout his career. In *To The Actor*, he presented exercises that illustrated four types of resistance that originate in the imagination: space as a solid material which the actor 'chisels' by his movements, space as water in which the body of the actor floats, space through which he flies, and the psychological state during which the movement is begun or continued before/after the physical one through radiation, i.e. inner movement.<sup>100</sup> Barba compares Chekhov's moulding, floating, flying and radiating to a technique practised by the Japanese theatre innovator Tatsumi Hijikata (1928-1986). It establishes 'distinct types of resistance by means of which the same design of movements acquires different energy temperatures (moving in a space of stone, of water or air...)'<sup>101</sup> Chekhov has built on Stanislavski's radiation and attention theories by encompassing in

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<sup>97</sup> '(...) составляйте композицию на диктуемую музыкой тему, занимая (т. е. ощущая) все пространство данного подиума.' Chekhov, *Uroki Mikhaila Chekhova* 17 (19).

<sup>98</sup> 'lit. 'the apportionment of the terrain'', Edward Braun, ed. *Meyerhold on Theatre*. London: Methuen, 1998, 149, 156.

<sup>99</sup> 'Чувство сценического пространства (...) не знакомо актеру. (...) Он не научился еще «рисовать» своим телом (...) в сценическом пространстве.' Chekhov 1: "Put' Aktera." 82.

<sup>100</sup> Chekhov 2002: 8 – 13.

<sup>101</sup> Barba 77.

them the sphere of communication among the actors as well as the form created by the actor's spatial presence.

In developing on Stanislavski's findings, Chekhov treats the System as the basis of the fundamental conditions of theatrical art upon which the future of the ideal theatre rests. Naturally, Stanislavski's phrase, 'Art and artists must move forward or else they will move backward',<sup>102</sup> inadvertently condones Chekhov's opposition to some of his strongest ideas, such as the use Emotion Memory. Stanislavski's prodigious student maintained his role as his disciple by advancing forward as his opponent. In support, Gromov argues that it is precisely the acquaintance with Stanislavski and his system that lit up in Chekhov an 'ardent commitment for searching, which never faded'.<sup>103</sup> This concern for the theatre of the future is what united Stanislavski and the participants of the First Studio. Indicating the motivation behind his own theories, Vakhtangov, the leader of the Studio at the time, states in 1922 '[w]e must find true theatrical means. We must find the eternal mask.'<sup>104</sup> By "eternal" Vakhtangov is referring to the constantly changing means in theatre, to the importance to preserve its contemporaneity, and to the ambitious searching for these new means as undertaken by Chekhov in Kaunas. In a letter to Oleka-Žilinskas, the director of the Kaunas State Theatre, Chekhov refers to the former's difficulties in managing the theatre studio and urges him to 'shatter and break' the stagnating conventions of the Kaunas State theatre, because 'Lithuania will experience artistic youth only *once!*'<sup>105</sup> Chekhov saw the Kaunas students, still free from methodological training dogmas, as a clean slate, a potential to achieve an ideal of the theatre of the future. It is no surprise that Byckling links Chekhov's decision to work in Lithuania and Latvia to the prospects of a new art, and terms the years he spent there 'an artistic laboratory, in which the thought and practice in acting and directing

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<sup>102</sup> Konstantin Stanislavski. "Lively Art." 1938. *Constantin Stanislavski. Stanislavski's Legacy: A Collection of Comments on a Variety of Aspects of an Actor's Art and Life*. Ed. Hapgood, Elisabeth Reynolds. London: Methuen, 1981, 29.

<sup>103</sup> 'Пламенная целеустремленность поисков, не угасавшая никогда потом, вспыхнула в нем от встречи с учением Станиславского'. Gromov 20.

<sup>104</sup> Malaev-Babel 153.

<sup>105</sup> 'Литва один раз только будет переживать творческую юность! (...) Крушите и ломайте!' Letter to Oleka-Žilinskas, 31 Aug. 1929, from Berlin, published in Chekhov 1: 370.

developed.’<sup>106</sup> In support, Chekhov tells his Kaunas laboratory that ‘[o]nly the actors who come to hate the current prostitution of theatre will lay the groundwork for the theatre of the future.’<sup>107</sup> While the stagnating Lithuanian theatre was indeed in need of help from such masters as Chekhov, for the master himself the Kaunas actors presented a possibility to test and develop his method.

Stanislavski and Chekhov’s methods are concerned with the laws of nature, which for both represent the *truthfulness* in the actors’ expression. Stanislavski himself questioned the idea of the System’s ‘followers’ by asking: ‘What system? (...) This bond [between those who share its ideas] is in the system, not that of Stanislavski, but that of the greatest creative artist of all - Dame Nature. My work is not that of invention but of research.’<sup>108</sup> The artistic explorations of Stanislavski, and later Chekhov, followed a path towards illuminating of what Chekhov called the ‘mysterious “something”’ of the human expression. Chekhov knew that the value of theatre, like of other arts, lies in its role to transcend what is manifested in nature and to discover the processes behind these manifestations. Rudolf Steiner (1861-1925), the founder of Anthroposophy, presented Chekhov with the means to utilise the laws of spiritual existence of the universe to the creative process.

## THE ORIGINS OF CHEKHOV’S METHODOLOGY: RUDOLF STEINER

Along with his philosophical work, Steiner carried his ideas on the spirituality of human existence into the art of theatre. He wrote plays and conceived Eurhythmy, the science of speech and gesture.<sup>109</sup> Steiner describes

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<sup>106</sup> ‘Культурный контекст в Литве и Латвии предлагал Чехову (...) надежд[у] на новые формы искусства.’; ‘Годы, проведенные [там], были для Чехова творческой лабораторией, в которой усовершенствовались и мышление, и практика актера и режиссера.’ Вуцклинг 160, 187.

<sup>107</sup> ‘Только актеры, возненавидевшие теперешнюю проституцию театра, создадут почву для будущего театра.’ Chekhov, *Uroki Mikhaila Chekhova* 39 (48).

<sup>108</sup> Stanislavski. “To the Members of the Moscow Art Theatre.” 1933. Hapgood 203.

<sup>109</sup> While Chekhov’s interest in Eurhythmy is well-known, I will refrain from discussing it here because the class notes in question do not concern speech. This is due to a few factors, mainly because the actors were inexperienced and in need of basic training before the intricacies of Eurhythmy would be introduced. For

Anthroposophy as a ‘spiritual science (...), which aims to understand the spiritual world and receive it into our ideas and thoughts, into our feelings, perceptions, and will’.<sup>110</sup> The Anthroposophical society in the UK outline that the main concern of the science, the inner freedom of an individual, can only be achieved through one’s spiritual development.<sup>111</sup> The physical world is seen as the manifestation of the spiritual, and when applied to art, the philosophy aims to transcend the naturalistic conceptions and reveal the experiences that exist beyond reality. This outlook also belies the Waldorf education, an alternative to standard repetition and logic-based learning that Steiner formulated, and which is used in some learning institutions to this day.

Byckling suggests that Anthroposophy played a decisive role in Chekhov’s life from the 1910s, when he first encountered Steiner’s ideas, to the end of his life’.<sup>112</sup> Between 1912 and 1918, Chekhov experienced a personal and professional crisis, and most historians attribute his interest in Steiner’s spiritual philosophy to the lack of emotional and spiritual fulfilment he was experiencing at the time.<sup>113</sup> As explained above, Chekhov was weary of the materialistic state of theatre and society, and felt the deep personal need to create higher art. Knebel’ suggests that he did not practice Anthroposophy as such, but its ‘appeal of the spiritual enlightenment, of elevation above the commonness’, as well as its ‘intuitive ability of knowledge, (...) echoed in Chekhov’s artistic nature, in his views on the spiritual significance of art.’<sup>114</sup> Steiner maintained that due to the materialism of the modern day, the spiritual origin of art has been lost. The artists were inclined to copy what their senses tell them, however in vain as ‘no copy of nature will

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Steiner’s discussion of the science and his views on performance and production, see Rudolf Steiner. *Speech and Drama*. London: Anthroposophical Publishing Company, 1959.

<sup>110</sup> Rudolf Steiner. “The Supersensible Origin of the Arts.” *Art as Spiritual Activity: Rudolf Steiner’s Contribution to the Visual Arts. Selected Lectures on the Visual Arts by Rudolf Steiner*. Ed. Howard, Michael. New York: Anthroposophic Press, 1998, 246.

<sup>111</sup> “Anthroposophy.” 4 Sept. 2011. Web. <http://anthroposophy.org.uk/index.php?id=14>.

<sup>112</sup> ‘Антропософия (...) играла решающую роль в жизни Чехова (...) с 1910-х гг. до конца его жизни.’ Byckling 28.

<sup>113</sup> See Byckling 27 – 28; Chamberlain 12 – 13; Mel Gordon, ed. Introduction. *On the Technique of Acting*. By Michael Chekhov. New York: Harper Perennial, 1991, xv.

<sup>114</sup> ‘Чехов не занимался специальными философскими проблемами [...] Но призыв к духовному прозрению, к возвышению над обыденщиной, наконец, культ интуитивной способности познания - все это находило глубокий отклик в его художественной натуре, в его представлениях о духовной значимости искусства.’ Knebel’. “O Mikhaile Chekhove i ego Tvorcheskom Nasledii.” Chekhov 1: 36 – 37.

ever equal nature itself.’<sup>115</sup> This basic tenet of Steiner’s artistic attitude accompanied Chekhov’s path away from Stanislavski’s illusions of reality at the MAT and the materialism of the industrial society of the twentieth-century. Steiner explained that art should transcend nature and reveal what stems from the processes that manifest it. The Kaunas lessons indicate that while his theatrical ideals echo those of Stanislavski, Chekhov’s initial method displays that his theory of creation is fundamentally grounded in Steiner’s theory of human nature summarised below.

The threefold structure of a man that is utilised by Chekhov underpins the anthroposophical view on how the man is related to the world, corresponding accordingly to his body, soul and spirit.<sup>116</sup> By body the man is aware of his physical world environment, by soul he ‘experiences pleasure and displeasure’, and the spiritual ‘becomes manifest in him when (...) he looks at things as a “divine being”’ (Steiner quotes Johann Wolfgang von Goethe here).<sup>117</sup> The latter refers to the ‘outer world’, which is revealed to the man through his spiritual being. Steiner suggests that the most spiritual feelings relate to the experiencing of the immaterial world, bringing ‘spiritual order’ to these sensations through the contemplation of thought.<sup>118</sup> Everything a man experiences as an individual being is allotted to the ego, or “I”. The “I” is the conscious focus of the whole threefold being, as it ‘draws into itself messages from (...) the spirit world through intuitions, just as through sensations it draws in messages from the physical world.’<sup>119</sup> The two worlds exist in tandem, comprising the man as a separate being from the rest of the physical world around him and an independent being in the spiritual world outside him. Like the physical man conveys the form that is grounded in the physical world, through the spiritual man ‘pulsate the elements of the external spirit-world.’<sup>120</sup> The physical can become permeated with the spiritual when the

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<sup>115</sup> Steiner. “The Supersensible Origin of the Arts.” Howard 238.

<sup>116</sup> While Stanislavski and Chekhov’s writings are not in the nature to be gender specific, and were so far interpreted as referring to both female and male, Steiner’s texts come from the body of writings that used male gender only as standard. For authenticity reasons, I will not alter such words as ‘man’, and male pronouns, however, whenever I quote Steiner’s words I apply them generally, to artists of both sexes.

<sup>117</sup> Rudolf Steiner. “Theory of Human Nature.” McDermot, Robert A., ed. *The Essential Steiner: Basic Writings of Rudolf Steiner*. Edinburgh: Floris Books, 1996, 108 – 109.

<sup>118</sup> Ibidem 110 – 114.

<sup>119</sup> Ibidem 123 – 126.

<sup>120</sup> Ibidem 127.

conscious “I” receives the Spirit-man (one’s spiritual being) and maintains the necessary force to transform a part of the body, making it ‘spiritualised’.<sup>121</sup> The spiritual beings are only empowered in the earthly manifestation when they are embodied by the physical man. Steiner maintains that the threefold connection of man to the worlds, as well as the man’s own threefold structure that corresponds to the worlds, are interconnected within a common order of the existence of the universe. Chekhov adapts this structure of body, soul and spirit and utilises it in the Kaunas classes in the role of the ‘personality’ as the communicator of the ‘individuality’.

In fact, during a performance by the Russian singer and actor Feodor Chaliapin, Chekhov noticed that in his moments of greatness he lived two different lives simultaneously. He explains in *Жизнь и Встречи* that he found a further indication about the ‘bifurcation of the consciousness in the great artists’ in Steiner.<sup>122</sup> During Chekhov’s personally detached method of imitation, as the image appears and is seen as an independent life by the inner actor, it is embodied by the conscious actor who’s expressed actions and emotions belong to the new life within him. While this partition of the actor has been shown to be rooted in Vakhtangov’s ideas on the relationship between the actor and the image, it is Steiner’s ideas on the supersensible experience that condition Chekhov’s treatment of the actor’s creative process. According to Anthroposophy, for such an experience to happen one must not say “I think” or “I feel”, but instead state that “something thinks in me, something makes emotions flash forth”.<sup>123</sup> This directly describes the progression of Chekhov’s Schemes of Creation, from the conception of the image in the world of creation, to its imitation.

Overall, the structure of Chekhov’s five schemes of creation utilises Anthroposophy’s arrangement in the Road to Self-Knowledge. Steiner outlines eight Meditations that can be practised to deepen one’s soul and thus advance

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<sup>121</sup> Ibidem 131.

<sup>122</sup> ‘Наблюдая игру Шаляпина (...) в лучшие свои минуты на сцене он жил одновременно в двух различных сознаниях’; ‘У Штейнера я также нашел указания на факт раздвоения сознания у больших художников.’ Chekhov 1: 215 – 216.

<sup>123</sup> Rudolf Steiner. *A Road to Self-Knowledge and The Threshold of the Spiritual World*. London: Rudolf Steiner Press, 1975, 36.



towards the spiritual world, or the inner freedom.<sup>124</sup> The Meditations guide the person from conscious contemplation to transcendental awareness, starting from the awareness of body as the manifestation of the soul right through to experiencing and understanding the outer supersensible worlds. The First Meditation aims to reveal the body as a member of the physical world that lies outside it, the Second and Third reveal the Elemental (spiritual) body and world, while in the Fifth the man learns of the third (not connected to the spiritual or physical worlds) inner body within his soul. The Seventh Meditation considers the experience of the supersensible worlds, while the Eighth concludes the process by contemplation of the man's existence as a succession of earthly lives intercepted by spiritual states of existence.<sup>125</sup>

In a similar way, during Chekhov's Schemes of Creation, the actor's individuality maintains secret, intuitive ways to the world of creation as the actor 'hears sounds from the world of images' and matures the produced images in his imagination. This echoes Steiner's Second Meditation, where a vigorous repetition of a thought converts it into an inner, yet objective, reality, stimulating an inner activity which approaches the spiritual world.<sup>126</sup> The act of receiving of the images can be explained by the Second and Third Meditations as direct experiencing of the Elemental body and world. In Chekhov's Third Scheme, as the body adapts to the impulses of the individuality, the First Meditation applies, suggesting an understanding of the physical body as part of the physical world, which is in fact a manifestation of the energies that lie beyond. Finally, Chekhov concludes his process of creation with the Fourth Scheme, where the actor *imitates* the image sent from above, or in Steiner's words, the supersensible world is experienced by the soul. Chekhov's explanation of the aftermath of creation, where both inner and outer actors become enriched with whatever had passed through them, can be illustrated with Steiner's Eight Meditation. It confirms that during 'the progressive development of the soul the range of vision is widened over a whole series of earlier terrestrial lives'.<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>124</sup> Ibidem 7.

<sup>125</sup> Ibidem 9 – 77.

<sup>126</sup> Ibidem 21.

<sup>127</sup> Ibidem 76.

Over the years Chekhov developed his theory on the creation process into Four Stages of Creation, which is fundamentally based on what he taught in Kaunas and Riga. During the First Stage, the Creative Individuality deep in the actor's soul oversees the 'preparatory work' over the arising images, while in the Second Stage these images are matured in the imagination of the actor. The physical incorporation of the images begins in the Third Stage, together with characterisation development. Lastly, during the Fourth Stage, the actor acquires Divided Consciousness, and the image 'disappears from his/her mind's eye and exists within him and acts upon his means of expression from inside him.'<sup>128</sup> Considering his early theory in Kaunas, and the developed method later in his career, creativity for Chekhov had for a while represented the process and qualities of a supersensible vision, explored by Anthroposophy.

As discussed above, Chekhov believed that for the actor to be ready to accept the vision that is sent from the world of creation, the body instrument must adapt a specific technique.<sup>129</sup> This stands as one of the conditions for a spiritual experience in Anthroposophy. Chekhov's concept of artistic attention, which refers to the actor's capability to apprehend the sent images at any time, arises from his demand for an ability to completely surrender one's consciousness and body to the inner impulses (see schemes 2 and 3, above). As the body is seen in Anthroposophy as a 'corporeal resistance' to our conception of the new experiences which penetrate the soul, the idea that only patience and attention 'can lead to our noticing true visions'<sup>130</sup> underlines Chekhov's conditioning for the artistic attention. Steiner here suggests that for someone to become aware of the extrasensory world, the man must make 'his strengthened thoughts work upon this apparatus' until it is 'remodelled'. In the context of Knebel's note that Chekhov was 'ill with fear' of materialism,<sup>131</sup> the method of ridding oneself of the physical obstacle to the spiritual enlightenment signified freedom which promised the future of a new, free theatre. Chekhov's technique of imitation in the Fourth scheme relies on such freedom as the actor's body is released from the clutches of

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<sup>128</sup> This text, "Four Stages of the Creative Process", was included in the later edited releases of Chekhov's original *To the Actor*, see *On the Technique of Acting*, 147 – 155.

<sup>129</sup> See Chekhov's Second and Third Schemes, as discussed above.

<sup>130</sup> Steiner 1975: 81 – 82.

<sup>131</sup> 'страх перед «материализмом» (...), которым [Чехов] был болен'. Knebel'. *Vsja Zhizn'*. Moskva: Vserossiiskoe Teatral'noe Obshchestvo, 1967, 58.

everyday behaviour and submitted to its fundamental function as the form that impresses upon it the immediate dialogue from the soul. Michael Howard, a Steiner expert, explains that Anthroposophy accounts for the originality in art as a quality that comes not from an individual, but rather through him/her, by his/her engagement with '*the world of origins*' [utilised by Chekhov as the world of creation].<sup>132</sup> In this way, Howard states, the artwork carries 'the stamp of the individual *through* whom (not *from* whom) it is born from the spiritual into the physical.'<sup>133</sup> In applying this method, Chekhov releases the actor from his/her material constraints and sets the body into what Yarrow calls above a neutral state. While in it, the actor is moved by visions from the dialogue between his/her individuality and the spiritual world of creation. Regarding the standpoints of Stanislavski and Chekhov concerning their varying ideas of creation, the difference is best described by Barba as 'the leap from experiencing [emotional involvement] to having experience [objective involvement].'<sup>134</sup>

Similarly, for symbolically inclined Edward Gordon Craig the complete control over the actor's outer manifestations also represents the only possibility for the ideal form of theatrical expression. In his 1911 publication *On the Art of the Theatre*, the English theatre artist discusses the controversial likening of an ideal actor to the 'Über-Marionette' on the grounds that if an actor can create from oneself a true piece of art, s/he can't be tainted by his/her emotions, because such an artist 'could control his face, features, voice and all, just as if his body were an instrument.'<sup>135</sup> Craig considered the ability of an actor to completely permeate his/her movements with the spiritual as an artistic advancement from the mere representation (naturalistic imitation) of nature. Chekhov took part in a mass scene in Craig and Stanislavski's 1912 production of *Hamlet* at the MAT, and Chamberlain suggests that even though Chekhov hardly mentions Craig in any of his writings, he nevertheless was familiar with his view through the production and by 'almost certainly' reading Craig's *On the Art of the Theatre*.<sup>136</sup> There, Craig discusses the actor's path as moving through

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<sup>132</sup> Howard. Introduction 71.

<sup>133</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>134</sup> Barba 65.

<sup>135</sup> Edward Gordon Craig. *On the Art of the Theatre*. New York: Theatre Arts Books, 1956, 67 – 68.

<sup>136</sup> Chamberlain 8.

Impersonation, Representation and 'advancing into Revelation', which marks the moment when the actor 'will reveal by means of movement the invisible things, those seen through the eye and not with the eye'.<sup>137</sup> This formula of creation as a meditative vision, completely detached from, but manifested in, physical reality, is the essence of Chekhov's method. His earthly actor is freed from the physical world by complete submission, hence the neutral body state, to inner impulses. In Kaunas and in Chekhov's later theories, rhythm is treated as the strongest of these impulses.

Knebel' remembers that Chekhov was 'infatuated with the rhythmic prose' of Andrei Belyi, for whom, in Chekhov's words, '[a] geometric figure was a harmonically resounding form. A sound turned into figure and image. Beauty - into feeling. Movement - into thought.'<sup>138</sup> This echoes the effect of rhythm during the aforementioned exercise when the Kaunas students had to move harmoniously in clearly established rhythmic patterns. Due to the impact of the 'inner rhythm', 'some kind of mystery and joy' takes over the participants who instead of a naturalistic representation are now permeated with a force, making them its manifestation. This striving for a 'blissful state' reminds one of Vakhtangov's views on the instinctive power of rhythm, outlined in his following statement during the 1919 rehearsals for *The Miracle of St. Anthony*, '[w]hen an actor gets accustomed to living with rhythm both in words and in movements - the fairy tale will come.'<sup>139</sup> However, as Malaev-Babel suggests, Chekhov's intuitive grasp on rhythm in his acting indicated that Vakhtangov learned from him as much as Chekhov from Vakhtangov, '[Chekhov] was influenced by Vakhtangov's concept of rhythm (...). The influence (...) was mutual'.<sup>140</sup> For Chekhov, it represented the inner pulse that gives life to the physical manifestations. In Kaunas, he tells his class that 'every work of art, just like a phenomenon of nature, must be saturated

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<sup>137</sup> Craig 46.

<sup>138</sup> Andrei Belyi, the prominent Russian poet and literary figure, was a member of the Russian Anthroposophical Society. '[Чехов] был увлечен ритмической прозой Белого'. Кнебел'. "О Mikhaile Chekhove i ego Tvorcheskom Nasledii." Chekhov 1: 22. 'Геометрическая фигура была для [Белого] формой, гармонично звучащей. Звук превращался в фигуру и образ. Красота - в чувство. Движение - в мысль.' Chekhov 1: "Zhizn' i Vstrechi." 197.

<sup>139</sup> Malaev-Babel 275.

<sup>140</sup> "On Vakhtangov's Work and Writings." Ibidem 5.

thoroughly with rhythm. Everything that falls out of rhythm is a disease.’<sup>141</sup> For him, like for Belyi, rhythm acts as direct - non-rational but wholly instinctive - force of the universal laws that harmony is based on. Indeed, Vakhtangov and later Stanislavski have used rhythm extensively in the development of a harmonious ensemble and in forming the characterisations.<sup>142</sup> The Tempo-Rhythm, as it became known in the System, refers to the tempo and the rhythm of speech and movement, and is employed by the actor to directly affect his/her feelings.<sup>143</sup> By adapting a certain pace, for example, the actor can order the ‘disobedient’ feelings to obey the characterisation to which that rhythm of the pace was modelled. For Stanislavski, rhythm is part and parcel of a physical action and character type, while Chekhov utilises it as a spiritual force, a subconscious impulse, a ‘joy’, that touches on the processes beyond outward reality. When writing to his former Kaunas Drama Studio group in 1934, Chekhov mentions three envelopes, titled *Atmosphere*, *Idea* and *Rhythm*, in which he was to disclose his thoughts ‘about the secrets of theatre.’<sup>144</sup> The last one, concerned with rhythm, is described by him as ‘the golden key, which opens the gate to the FUTURE of our theatre.’ Speaking of Steiner’s Anthroposophy and his rhythm-based science of Eurythmy, Belyi suggests that for Chekhov Steiner ‘the “rhythmicist” was above all a specialist in providing the direction for a ‘genuine revolution in the art of theatre’.<sup>145</sup> In *To The Actor*, he confirms that the principles that govern the universe and the life of people, and those that ‘bring harmony and rhythm’ to arts,

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<sup>141</sup> ‘Каждое произведение искусства, как и явление природы, должно быть насквозь пропитано ритмом. Все то, что выпадает из ритма, есть болезнь.’ Chekhov, *Uroki Mikhaila Chekhova* 44 (56).

<sup>142</sup> Linking rhythm with the dynamics of Imaginative Realism, Vakhtangov suggests that in his ‘torturous attempts to break out of Stanislavski’s chains’, he ‘on [his] own, a year ahead of Stanislavski, started speaking of rhythm and plasticity’. Malaev-Babel 131. Simonov recalls how during the 1918 production of *The Miracle of St. Anthony*, Vakhtangov achieved a ‘perfect ensemble’ by concentrating on, among other things, the ‘tempo-rhythm of each actor.’ Simonov 100.

<sup>143</sup> Stanislavski 2010: 463, 502.

<sup>144</sup> ‘конверт I - «Атмосфера», конверт II - «Идея», конверт III - «Ритм». (Последний (...) есть золотой ключ, отпирающий врата в наше театральное БУДУЩЕЕ!)’ Letter sent from Riga to Kaunas, dated 20 Mar. 1934, published in Chekhov 1: 423. The original is kept at the LMTMC, archive of Chekhov, Eil. Nr. 41, A196/1. Only the letter on theatrical atmosphere was sent/survives at the LMTMC.

<sup>145</sup> Eurythmy refers to inward gestures and motivations of speech as it ‘seeks to give direct expression, from out of the individual performer, to the rhythm which pervades the human organism and Nature.’ Arild Rosenkrantz. “The New Impulse in Art.” 13 Jul. 2011. Web. [http://wn.rsarchive.org/Eurhythm/NewImp\\_index.html](http://wn.rsarchive.org/Eurhythm/NewImp_index.html). Original publication in *The Fruits of Anthroposophy — an Introduction to The Work of Dr. Rudolf Steiner*. London: The Threefold Commonwealth, 1922. ‘[Штейнер] был ритмизатором (...) дал указания для подлинной революции сценического искусства (М. Чехов считает здесь спецом его)’. Andrei Belyi. *Vospominania o Shteinere*. Paris: La Presse Libre, 1982, 24.

all belong to the *Laws of Composition*,<sup>146</sup> and can be utilised in every actor's performance. In the later volumes of his actor training techniques, Chekhov reaffirms the importance of rhythm by maintaining that it is 'the highest way of receiving and expressing things.'<sup>147</sup>

Speaking in the introduction to the *Lessons for the Professional Actor*, Mel Gordon reviewed Chekhov's work as an obsession of '[m]arrying the inner truth and emotional depth of Stanislavsky's system with the beauty and spiritual impact of Steiner's work'.<sup>148</sup> Indeed, objective or not, feelings aroused in the actor formulate a sincere, psychologically deep performance. Chekhov took on Stanislavski's demand for sincere emotions and instead applied it to the life objectively created by the actor, which during performance functions through the actor, expressing feelings that belong to the created being and not the actor himself/herself. Truthfulness, whether referring to the actor's real emotions or a complete submission to subconscious impulses, is the sub-score in the methods and philosophies of all so far mentioned in the discussion. Stanislavski, Steiner, Chekhov and others all look to nature and laws of creation in order to illuminate the mysteries of the creative process. For them, art obeys one law above all, captured in the following phrase by Steiner: '[t]he truth in Nature shines forth to the spirit: from the truth in art the spirit shines forth.'<sup>149</sup> Chekhov's quest towards the Theatre of the Future is motivated by his ambition to discover the processes that encompass the laws of Nature, and can therefore be utilised in a more spiritually and organically integrated art of theatre. It is due to this ambition that he left Russia in 1928, and suffered cultural estrangement and nationalistic hostility when he was in Germany, France, Lithuania and Latvia, before moving to Britain in 1935 and then America in 1938. In a letter to the Moscow Art Second Theatre group (former First Studio), Chekhov explains his departure in terms of giving way to the majority of the group, from which he was isolated due to differences in ideas. 'To stay in the theatre as an actor, who *just* plays a number of roles, is for me impossible', Chekhov writes, '[w]hat can captivate and awaken me to creativity is only *the idea of a new theatre overall, the idea of a new*

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<sup>146</sup> Chekhov 2002: 93.

<sup>147</sup> Chekhov 1985: 164.

<sup>148</sup> Gordon. Introduction. Chekhov 1991: 15.

<sup>149</sup> Steiner 1959: 176.

*theatrical art.*<sup>150</sup> This ambition underlines one of Chekhov's most significant concepts, the theatrical *atmosphere*, of the trilogy of envelopes sent to the students in Kaunas containing Chekhov's most profound findings on the art of theatre.

## ATMOSPHERE

In October 1933, Chekhov, asked by Oleka-Žilinskas, sent the students of his former Kaunas class a letter in which he outlined the fundamentals of theatrical *atmosphere*.<sup>151</sup> This subject never ceased to occupy Chekhov's methodology throughout his career. Chamberlain suggests that he 'developed the idea in theory and practice more extensively than anyone else [Meyerhold and Stanislavski were among others who considered it important]'.<sup>152</sup> In the notes from the classes discussed so far, the theatrical *atmosphere* is discussed briefly, outlining that elusive something which draws the audience to the theatre.<sup>153</sup> Other class notes taken by Algirdas Jakševičius are also headed 'Lecture on the theatrical atmosphere', and discuss what Chekhov elaborates on in his letter.<sup>154</sup>

By atmosphere Chekhov refers to the certain mood, feeling, or character that any presence, whether animate or inanimate, generates. For example, the reverence one feels in a church, the ability of one person to change the mood in a crowded room upon entering it, or the actors onstage generating a certain atmosphere in unison, and through it capturing those in the auditorium. Chekhov presents *atmosphere* as a uniting quality and one part of the familiar threefold

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<sup>150</sup> 'Устраниться и предоставить большинству коллектива (...) свободно осуществить его собственные замыслы. (...) Оставаться в театре в качестве актера, *просто* играющего ряд ролей, для меня невозможно (...) Меня может увлекать и побуждать к творчеству только *идея нового театра в целом, идея нового театрального искусства.*' Letter dated 29 Aug. 1928, sent from Berlin, published in Chekhov 1: 350.

<sup>151</sup> Original, "Paskaita apie atmosferą, atsiųsta iš Rygos į Kauną." TS. Sent on 4 Oct. 1933, held at the LMTMC, archive of Chekhov, eil. Nr. 46, A196/2. Published under the title "Kollektivu Studii Litovskogo Gosudarstvenogo Teatra" in Chekhov, *Uroki Mikhaila Chekhova*. For accessibility purposes, I will refer to the published article, including the page numbers for the original in the brackets.

<sup>152</sup> Chamberlain. "Michael Chekhov on the Technique of Acting..." Hodge 70.

<sup>153</sup> 'нас в [театре] привлекла какая-то (...) атмосфера театра.' Chekhov, *Uroki Mikhaila Chekhova* 10 (8).

<sup>154</sup> "Paskaita apie spektaklio atmosferą." 1932? MS. Eil. Nr. 51, A467, archive of Chekhov, LMTMC.

structure that he also applies to staging a play. While the spirit of the performance is the 'idea' and the body is everything that is seen and heard, atmosphere forms the independent soul of the play. As it is produced by transcendental, immaterial process, this state can only be discovered through 'artistic feeling' and 'the actor's intuition', never by a 'rational path.'<sup>155</sup> The spirituality of theatrical *atmosphere* reaffirms the relevance of Anthroposophy in arts, supported by Steiner's belief that '[e]verything the actor has to do must be done instinctively.'<sup>156</sup> It is no surprise that Knebel', recalling Chekhov's home Studio classes on *atmosphere*, suggests that for him atmosphere was more than an artistic issue like it was to Stanislavski, for example. For Chekhov, it was 'likely to be the most important stimulus of the actor's creation.'<sup>157</sup>

Indeed, the two books on acting written by Chekhov, the 1945 *О Технике Актера* and the English language version *To The Actor*, recall almost identical conditions and effects of the state. The latter volume, for example, suggests that especially in 'our dry and intellectual era' depriving the play of its atmosphere, i.e. 'its *heart*, its *feeling soul*, would reduce it to a '*mechanism*'.<sup>158</sup> The transcendence of the concept carries what in Chekhov's opinion is slipping away from the grasp of humanity, the means to return the theatre to an art that surpasses the banalities of the materialistic world. For theatre to truly be a manifestation of nature's dialogue, something that arouses emotions in its audience, the actors and director have, Chekhov declares, a 'great mission (...) to save the *soul* of the theatre and with it the future of our profession.'<sup>159</sup> Accordingly, during the aforementioned Four Stages of Creation, Chekhov describes the very beginning of a production, the play-reading stage, with an assertion that before any special attention is paid to their individual characters, actors should 'live' in the 'general Atmosphere of the play', and observe the images arising out of that *atmosphere*.<sup>160</sup> The actors are encouraged to rely on

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<sup>155</sup> '[атмосфера] должна быть найдена путем художественного ощущения, (...) актерской интуиции.'; '[не] рассудочным путем.' Chekhov. "Kollektivu Studii Litovskogo Gosudarstvenogo Teatra." *Uroki Mikhaila Chekhova* 55 (8).

<sup>156</sup> Steiner 1959: 194.

<sup>157</sup> '[Чехов] рассматривал «атмосферу» не только как одну из важных творческих проблем, но едва ли не самый сильный стимул актерского творчества.' Knebel'. *Vsja Zhizn'* 74.

<sup>158</sup> Chekhov 2002: 53 – 54.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibidem* 54.

<sup>160</sup> Chekhov 1991: 148.



their intuition rather than intellect from the very beginning of the creative process.

In his later theories, Chekhov built on his concept of *atmosphere* for the development of one of the most distinguished features of his method, the Psychological Gesture. Abbreviated by Chekhov as the PG, the gesture also, like *atmosphere*, refers to a way to indirectly inspire the actor's feelings. The PG is the companion of *atmosphere* and should be applied during the actor's first efforts to investigate the character. Again relying on intuition, the actor must establish what the 'main desire' of the character is and build a movement, or the PG, inseminated with this desire, 'step by step'.<sup>161</sup> Eventually, the gesture will 'take possession of [the actor] entirely', awakening his/her will and feelings and making him/her become 'the very character'.<sup>162</sup> Chekhov's concept of the PG is reminiscent of Vakhtangov's aforementioned preoccupation with the actors' plasticity and the harmony between the 'physical truth' and the 'inner truth'. Vakhtangov here suggests that in order to influence the actor's creative nature, s/he must 'begin with physical tasks' because '[p]hysical truth is simpler' and 'easier to fixate'.<sup>163</sup> In the application of the PG, like in the creation and validity of *atmosphere*, Chekhov's aim is to fixate on the absolute essence of the content. Chekhov suggests that by creating the correct *atmosphere* the various characterisations in a play will attain a 'greater significance', thus becoming the archetypal 'symbols' for their kind.<sup>164</sup> In turn, as the PG is, in Chekhov's words, an 'archetypal gesture', by applying it the actors can capture the 'unchangeable core' of the individual characters. He praised Vakhtangov's approach in directing him in the title role of August Strindberg's *Erik XIV*, when Vakhtangov briefly 'demonstrated' the outline of the role which managed to clarify the full Act for Chekhov in detail.<sup>165</sup> By this Chekhov is referring to an archetypal gesture that Vakhtangov applied in order to reveal the essence of Erik to Chekhov. '[Vakhtangov]', the latter states, 'told us to work out an acute, brief, bright, completely fixed gesture. In this case', as in the method of Chekhov's PG, 'a lot

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<sup>161</sup> Chekhov 2002: 67.

<sup>162</sup> Ibidem 68 – 70.

<sup>163</sup> Malaev-Babel 94.

<sup>164</sup> Chekhov 2002: 49.

<sup>165</sup> 'Ставя «Эрика XIV» [Вахтангов] показал мне (...) рисунок роли (...) Эрика (...) затратив на это не более двух минут. После его показа мне стал ясен весь акт во всех деталях.' Chekhov 1: "Put' Aktera." 92.

was done consciously and then transferred to the sphere of the subconscious.<sup>166</sup> Echoing Stanislavski's fundamental condition for the System, to induce an actor's subconscious through the conscious psychotechnique,<sup>167</sup> the archetypal gesture in the methods of Vakhtangov and later Chekhov illustrates that they both built up the technique precisely on that condition. Following in Vakhtangov's footsteps, however, Chekhov chose to, figuratively speaking, replace 'psychotechnique' with 'technique', developing further the harmony between the inner and the outer.

The discussion has outlined the extent to which Byckling's belief that Chekhov's method is a continuation of Stanislavski's ideas through his own interpretation is true. At the same time, it also revealed the extent of Knebel's view that in Anthroposophy Chekhov found the spiritual enlightenment that underlined the formation of his techniques. The Kaunas classes have shown that Chekhov's idea of acting, or any art for that matter, is a direct response to the modern day and its demands. Reciting the words of Belyi, Chekhov tells his Kaunas class that 'the epoch which we inhabit is an epoch of the mind', and suggests that creation based only on inspiration is therefore no longer possible. He tells his students to think firstly 'what role the theatre plays in the existence of humanity', because as much as 'the artist in the past was an instinctive creator, we must be conscientious.'<sup>168</sup> In the view of analysing Chekhov's method in terms of his digression from Stanislavski, it was confirmed that the substantial influence of Steiner was due to Chekhov's striving for balance. His dissatisfaction with the artificiality and naturalism that denies creativity in the contemporary theatre motivated his search for the ways that would counter that. In *To The Actor*, Chekhov assures that his method is thoroughly permeated with a double function of balance, to 'put the actor even more firmly on a *practical* ground and (...) give him a sound balance between tangible and intangible (...) and thus rescue him from

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<sup>166</sup> 'В роли Эрика XIV было (...) задание (...) Вахтангова выработать острый, лаконичный, яркий, законченный фиксированный жест. В этом случае было много сделано сознательно и потом перешло в область подсознания.' Chekhov 2: "Otvety na anketu po psikhologii akterskogo tvorchestva." 72.

<sup>167</sup> See page 27.

<sup>168</sup> Belyi stated: эпоха, в которой живет человечество нынче, - эпоха развития самосознания и укрепления личного «я». Chekhov 1: "Zhizn' i Vstrechi." 196.; 'Эпоха, в которой мы проживаем - эпоха головы.'; 'Художник жил на сфере вдохновения (...) Теперь наступила новая эпоха, которая заключается в том, что пользованных до сих пор средств не хватает.'; 'Поскольку художник в прошлом был бессознательным творцом, постольку мы должны быть сознательны'. Chekhov, *Uroki Mikhaila Chekhova* 40 - 42.

banalities and from artistic suffocation.’<sup>169</sup> After all, Stanislavski formulated the System to counter the artificial and standardised acting of his day. As mentioned before, Chekhov not so much opposed, but rather joined in his teacher’s ambitious mission to find ideal means of training for an ideal, future actor. In his time, the spiritual science of Anthroposophy provided the means to approach that ideal.

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<sup>169</sup> Chekhov 2002: 160.

## CHAPTER II

### CHEKHOV'S PRODUCTIONS AT THE KAUNAS STATE THEATRE

The achievements of Chekhov's classes at the Kaunas State Theatre were showcased in three plays he directed there between August 1932 and September 1933. William Shakespeare's tragedy *Hamlet*, the rehearsals for which were directly interwoven into the lessons discussed in the previous chapter, was followed by the bard's comedy the *Twelfth Night*. Chekhov also directed these two plays in Riga, where they premiered in 1932. Although while in Lithuania he limited his role to a director and teacher, in Riga he also acted in all of his productions. Chekhov's visit to Lithuania concluded with Gogol's satirical play *The Government Inspector*, which is actually the play that marked Chekhov's arrival to the Baltic States. In April 1931 he recreated his famous rendition of Khlestakov at the Russian Drama Theatre in Riga, a role originally conceived by him in 1921 First Studio production of Gogol's play, directed by Stanislavski. As well as *The Government Inspector*, Chekhov had been involved either as an actor, or both an actor and a director, with all the three plays he directed in Kaunas during his time at the Moscow Art Theatre and the First Studio. In 1920, he played Malvolio in the *Twelfth Night* (directed by Stanislavski and Boris Sushkevitch) and in 1924 he co-directed and played the protagonist in the Second MAT's *Hamlet*. This fact is also applicable to his productions in Riga. Other than those mentioned above, in Riga Chekhov also directed, and had the lead roles in, Strindberg's *Erik XIV*, a play that was in 1921 directed by Vakhtangov and starred Chekhov as Erik; and Fyodor Dostoyevski's *The Village of Stepanchikovo*, for the adaptation of which Chekhov was also preparing his role as Foma Opiskin in 1916 until the director, Stanislavski, decided to give the role to Ivan Moskvin. Even the one play Chekhov did not act in while at the MAT (he was engaged in the lead role in 1911, before he joined the MAT), Aleksei Tolstoy's *The Death of Ivan the Terrible*, was selected by Chekhov to

direct and act in the title role in Riga because, as he states in his autobiography, he ‘dreamt about the role of [Ivan] the Terrible for a long time.’<sup>170</sup> Chekhov also remained faithful to his Moscow repertoire in Germany, where he directed the *Twelfth Night* for the Habima theatre company in 1930, and in Paris, where he acted in and directed *Hamlet* 1931. While for Chekhov the three plays he directed in Kaunas, like all those he worked on in Riga, obviously provided rich material for interpretation, their origins within his career being based in Moscow encouraged the nationalistic Lithuanians to attack Chekhov for the apparent ‘Russification’ of the national theatre. In the politically driven outcries of the press, the productions were treated as threatening to the identity of the national Lithuanian theatre, which was weak and vulnerable in its youth. I will analyse the existing material relevant to the three Kaunas productions in order to shed some light on Chekhov’s artistic vision, in regard to its relevance to the context of Lithuania and the State Theatre at the time. I will also point out the link between his teaching approach that highlights ensemble and composition, and how that transpires in his productions.

## THE KAUNAS STATE THEATRE

In 1929, the artistic director of the Kaunas State Theatre, Jurgis Savickis, invited Andrius Oleka-Žilinskas to direct there. Before becoming the artistic director of the theatre two years later, Oleka-Žilinskas then challenged the stagnating Lithuanian performance and production standards with his directing debut in Lithuania, *Šarūnas* (by the Lithuanian author Vincas Krėvė-Mickevičius). In this ‘revolutionary’ production, the director underlined the play’s themes of heroism and the uniting of a nation not in the usual naturalistic approach, but with an emphasis on the philosophical and moral issues; he applied a rhythmic tempo that made the style of the production almost expressionistic.<sup>171</sup> However, while

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<sup>170</sup> ‘О роли Грозного я мечтал давно.’ Chekhov 1: “Zhizn’ i Vstrechi.” 249.

<sup>171</sup> Irena Aleksaitė. “Andriaus Olekos-Žilinsko Režisūros ir Pedagogikos Novacijos.” *Lietuvių Teatro Istorija 1929-1935*. Vol. 1. Ed. Girdzijauskaitė, Audronė. Vilnius: Gervelė, 2000, 42 – 55. [“The Innovations of Oleka-Žilinskas’ Directing and Teaching.”]

the conceptual directing based on a system of acting and play analysis challenged the rushed and melodramatic habits of the Lithuanian stage, these traits did not cease to populate the majority of the State Theatre performances in the early 1930s. Borisas Dauguvietis, a long-term director at the theatre, was at the forefront in terms of the quantity of productions. He maintained a varied repertoire, producing such plays as the pacifist comedy *Merchants of Glory* (by Marcel Pagnol and Paul Nivoix) and the Lithuanian historic drama *Naujieji Žmonės* (*The New People*) by Petras Vaičiūnas. The press remarked on Dauguvietis's simplistic and superficial interpretations and direction, summing up the directing achievements of the 1931/1932 season as 'clamping down the byways of naturalism' and 'vulgarity'.<sup>172</sup> As well as Oleka-Žilinskas, other directors of this time, such as Vladas Fedotas-Sipavičius, Stasys Pilka, and, most notably, Dauguvietis, have conscientiously included Lithuanian texts in their 1931 - 1933 repertoire for the State Theatre. However, the latter three home-grown talents were seen as mediocre in their artistic abilities and set in provincial traditions. Looking back at the success of *Šarūnas*, and Oleka-Žilinskas's systemised and befitting to the thoughts of the author direction, it became clear that national plays alone cannot form the artistic identity of the national theatre. In representation of the public, the press noted the lack of Lithuanian creed and patriotism in the vast majority of the State Theatre productions.

In reply to the widespread dissatisfaction with his theatre and the constant call for artistic, ideological and managerial reforms from the press, Oleka-Žilinskas invited Chekhov. The director of the State Theatre had great plans for the Lithuanian stage, the Lithuanian theatre historian Dovydas Judelevičius describing his goal as a 'model aiming for great philosophical and poetic formulations'.<sup>173</sup> The writer agrees that Chekhov's directing and pedagogy were befitting to bringing the Kaunas artists closer to that goal. Chekhov was to take over directing as well as teaching at the Drama Studio, while Oleka-Žilinskas concentrated on the managerial and financial matters. At the time, Chekhov was the sole non-

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<sup>172</sup> Neirantas. „„Garbės Spekulantai“.“ *Vairas* [Kaunas] 2 1932: 216 (annual volume). Print. [*“Merchants of Glory.” The Wheel*]; Neirantas. “Dramos Sezonui Pasibaigus.” *Vairas* 7-8 1932: 383 (annual volume). Print. [*“Having Finished the Drama Season”*].

<sup>173</sup> Judelevičius, “Michailo Čechovo Režisūra Valstybės Teatre.” *Girdzijauskaitė* 1: 142. [*“Michael Chekhov's Directing at the State Theatre.”*]

Lithuanian drama director at the State Theatre. He instantly became isolated by the nationalistic press due to his immigration status, while the established directors at the theatre were also not keen on the impending reform of their theatrical tradition. Within this context, Chekhov took on the challenging role of being the first candidate to continue on Oleka-Žilinskas's promising 'revolutionary' work.

## HAMLET

As mentioned above, Chekhov had been involved with Shakespeare's tragedy three times before commencing the rehearsals at the Kaunas State Theatre. This count does not include the 1921 MAT production, directed by the unlikely pair of Stanislavski and symbolist Edward Gordon Craig, because Chekhov was then only cast as a crowd member. Nevertheless, the subsequent 1924 Second MAT production, as Laurence Senelick suggests, 'based many of its "tragic-grotesque" elements' on the 1921 production, and Chekhov's Hamlet 'sought the mystical "invisible world" that Craig had hoped Kachalov [who played Hamlet in the 1921 production] would seek'.<sup>174</sup> The 1924 *Hamlet* was collectively directed by Vladimir Tatarinov, Aleksander Cheban and Valentin Smyshlyaev and although their joint efforts resulted in the acting lacking a collective harmony,<sup>175</sup> the interpretation belied Chekhov's all future productions of the play, including those in Kaunas and at the Latvian National Theatre in Riga. Smyshlyaev contributed a crucial thought that *Hamlet*, in the words remembered by Chekhov's assistant Viktor Gromov, 'is not a tragedy, but (...) a bright poem about a man, who fights evil and finds redemption through death'.<sup>176</sup> It was this production that did not feature an actor as the ghost of Hamlet's father; instead, Chekhov spoke and reacted to an invisible matter, as if the ghost was his hallucination. In the 1931 Paris production, which

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<sup>174</sup> Laurence Senelick. *Gordon Craig's Moscow Hamlet: A Reconstruction*. Connecticut: Greenwood, 1982, 185.

<sup>175</sup> 'all the shortcomings of [the *Hamlet* directors'] method of 'collective direction' was clearly displayed in their work. Each actor performed in his own way, and all differently'. Konstantin Rudnitsky. *Russian and Soviet Theatre: Tradition and the Avant-Garde*. London: Thames and Hudson, 2000, 113.

<sup>176</sup> '«Гамлет» представляется мне не трагедией, а (...) светлой поэмой о человеке, борющемся со злом и нашедшем искупление через смерть'. Gromov 108.

Chekhov directed and played the title role in, *Hamlet's* hallucinations came to signify his definite departure from a 'melancholic prince' to a 'crazy man', a 'contemporary man'.<sup>177</sup> Accordingly, the historic relevance was disregarded as minimal decorations and actors, dressed in modern dinner suits, revealed the moral and philosophical issues of the play as timeless. The following production in Riga, the rehearsals for which ran parallel to the Lithuanian one, maintained the context of the Middle Ages. It underlined the morality issue as the allegorical fight against evil is won by Hamlet not in the spirit of revenge or aggression, but in psychological maturity and spiritual awakening. As Chekhov stated in regard to the Latvian production, in which he played the title role in Russian along with the Latvian actors, Hamlet defeats the king not by 'the sword, but by the power of the soul, (...) by the power of the actor's art'.<sup>178</sup> In Kaunas, while the interpretation of the tragedy was shared with the Riga production, the director, not having to act in his production, was utilising this new-found freedom in the presentation of the tragedy. Byckling notes that even though in the Latvian capital Chekhov 'received recognition as an outstanding actor' whom people would come to see repeatedly in the same productions, he was becoming progressively less satisfied with his acting success. Byckling here recounts Chekhov's letter to his friend in which he expresses his happiness about working on *Hamlet* in Kaunas because, in his own words, "I know I will not be acting myself!"<sup>179</sup> Fulfilling his ambition to master the theatre beyond acting, Chekhov concentrated on a thorough cooperation with the stage designer. As the Kaunas *Hamlet* was the first of four productions of Shakespeare's play in which Chekhov did not act, the objectivity resulting from his role as a director can be granted with the success of the elaborate and original scenography. In support, Byckling indeed suggests that this production featured 'new possibilities in the stage design for the tragedy'.<sup>180</sup>

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<sup>177</sup> Byckling quotes a critic's review of the production; '«Гамлет Чехова не приц-меланхолик [...] Это современный человек, сумасшедший» [italics - J.K.]. Byckling 104.

<sup>178</sup> Quoted in Judelevičius. "Michailo Čečovo Režisūra Valstybės Teatre." *Girdzijauskaitė* 1: 151. Original in B. Orechkin "M. A. Chekhov-Gamlet." *Segodnia* [Riga] 20 Oct. 1932: 8.

<sup>179</sup> 'В Риге [Чехов] получил признание как замечательный актер (...) зрители приходили в театр на одни и те же спектакли [чтобы увидеть Чехова] (...) Но в период наи большего успеха актерские выступления стали все меньше убовлетворять Чехова.'; '«Моя работа [с «Гамлетом» в Каунасе] доставляет мне особенную радость, так как я знаю, что сам играть небуду!» Byckling 147.

<sup>180</sup> 'каунасский «Гамлет» был открытием новых возможностей трагедии и ее декорационного оформления.' Byckling 162.



When Chekhov was working with the Habima theatre group in Germany in 1930, he said he ‘was captivated by the idea of *Hamlet*’, and saw the play as the ‘first step towards the realisation of the new theatre.’<sup>181</sup> Since Chekhov’s first address to his Kaunas students mused over the theatre of the future, *Hamlet* was entirely subordinated to Chekhov’s idea of the new theatre, both in terms of the acting techniques and the production values (such as stage design). Chekhov’s approach was befitting to the artistic needs of the State Theatre, which after its establishment in 1920 still did not have a strong artistic profile. As a reply to the theatre crisis commonly sensationalised by the press, Oleka-Žilinskas declared with optimism ‘[w]hoever has the luck of working in the theatre rests on all those crises like on soft bedding.’<sup>182</sup> The need for a reform was made clear by the press, the public (represented in the press), and Oleka-Žilinskas and Chekhov’s ambitious ideas. For Chekhov, Shakespeare’s tragedy was befitting to these unstable conditions, and carried the means of displaying an ambitious sense of fortitude and victory to the audiences.

*Hamlet* premiered at the State Theatre on 11 October 1932, two months after Chekhov’s first address to the students of the Drama class and the start of the rehearsals. In Chekhov’s adaptation the *Hamlet* text undergone a considerable amount of cuts. Looking at the copies of the text that belonged to Vera Solovjova-Olekienė and Jurgis Petrauskas, who played the Queen and Polonius respectively, one of the major omissions is the cutting of the Norwegian conflict context in act 1 (scene 2), and instead introducing the protagonist of *Hamlet*, played by Oleka-Žilinskas, immediately during this scene.<sup>183</sup> *Hamlet*’s moral struggle against the injustice done by his uncle becomes the drive of the production. Chekhov explains this direction as a result of the perceived ‘optimistic side of the tragedy’, where the good (*Hamlet*) fights the evil (the King and his fellows).<sup>184</sup> Byckling notes that in his Second MAT production of *Hamlet* the religious element deemed the play a

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<sup>181</sup> ‘Был одержим идеей «Гамлета» (...) представлял себе как первый шаг к осуществлению нового театра.’ Chekhov 1: “Zhizn’ i Vstrechi.” 230.

<sup>182</sup> A. Oleka-Žilinskas quoted in “Artistai ir krizis.” *7 Meno Dienos* [Kaunas] 76 1932: 19. Print. [“Artists and the Crisis.” *7 Days of Art*].

<sup>183</sup> Typescript copies of the 1932 *Hamlet* rehearsals text are held at the National Lithuanian Archives of Literature and Art (as of now NLALA), Vilnius, archive of the National Theatre, 101, Ap. 1, byla 159 (Solovjova-Olekienė’s) and byla 194 (Petrauskas’s) 3.

<sup>184</sup> M. Chekhov interviewed in “Iš Pasikalbėjimo su „Hamleto“ Režisierium M. Čechovu.” *7 Meno Dienos* 85 1932: 3. Print. [“From the Conversation with M. Chekhov, the Director of *Hamlet*.”]

counterbalance to the prominent anti-religious tendencies of the Communist Russia.<sup>185</sup> This approach to the play would have appealed to Catholic Lithuania, who felt reassured by the religious origins of the good versus evil interpretation. The viewers would have seen this production as Chekhov's rejection of the Communist dogma, which has been perceived as a threat in independent Lithuania ever since the Soviets first came to power in Russia in 1922.

The calculated omissions in the ending of the play confirm that such heroic fight validates any sacrifice. The adapted text concludes with Horatio telling the wounded Hamlet that he will drink from the poisoned cup and follow his friend to death, and the scene as well as the production is ended with the famous lines:

HAMLET.                    No, no Horatio, If thou didst ever hold me  
                                  In thy heart, in this harsh world,  
                                  Draw thy breath in pain,  
                                  To tell my story.  
                                  The rest is silence.<sup>186</sup>

Judelevičius elaborates on the production's celebratory ending (which also featured in the Riga production): 'The deceased Hamlet was shown a grand respect by the death march (...) Lights would come on in the auditorium, the flags [representative of Hamlet's kingdom, see fig. 6, below] on the stage would fly (...) The border between the auditorium and the stage would disappear, the viewer was again drawn into the action; however this time not into painful and tragic circumstances, but into the symbolic triumph of the good.'<sup>187</sup> When speaking to the press months after the premiere, Chekhov further reiterated the positive connotations of the tragedy, referring to the death of the King in *Hamlet* as a 'complete elimination', and describing the murder of the protagonist as 'the birth of a higher life.'<sup>188</sup> Like in his classes, where he impressed upon the students the

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<sup>185</sup> '«Гамлет», по замыслу Чехова, должен был стать «спектаклем-противовесом» антирелигиозным тенденциям.' Вуцклинг 46.

<sup>186</sup> The last four lines from Solovjova-Olekienė's script, not translated directly from Lithuanian but drawn in accordance from the original *Hamlet*, see William Shakespeare. *Tragedies*. London: Marshall Cavendish, 1988, 373.

<sup>187</sup> Judelevičius, "Michailo Čechovo Režisūra Valstybės Teatre." *Girdzijauskaitė* 1: 156.

<sup>188</sup> "Iš Pasikalbėjimo su „Hamletu“ Režisierium M. Čechovu." *7 Meno Dienos* 85 1932: 4.

striving for a new theatre, Chekhov's interpretation of *Hamlet* was meant to inspire the same spirit in the audiences. After all, Oleka-Žilinskas had spoken out that the creation of a national identity in theatre, the lack of which was partly responsible for the drama crisis in the country at the time, could only be achieved with the help of a 'thinking public'.<sup>189</sup> Chekhov's rendering of the play motivated the viewers to contemplate the strength of ambition, determination and moral ethics, appealing to and questioning their own ideals.



Figure 6.

In order to reinforce the spirit of the theatrical reform, Chekhov aimed to create a 'strong' and 'active' protagonist instead of an 'indifferent sceptic'.<sup>190</sup> In act 1, during the first encounter between Hamlet and the ghost of his father, Chekhov alters Hamlet's reply to the ghost's claim 'I am thy father's spirit' from 'O god!' to the cooperating 'You are my father's spirit'.<sup>191</sup> Like in the Second MAT production, the ghost in Kaunas and Riga is implied rather than personified by an actor. In Lithuania, Chekhov does it with the help of stage lights, while the featured speech is uttered by Hamlet as his inner monologue. During the Moscow production Chekhov believed that the ghost, as Knebel' recalls, 'reveals to Hamlet

<sup>189</sup> "Pas Valst. Teatro Direktorių A. Oleka-Žilinską." 7 *Meno Dienos* 84 1932: 17. Print. ["An Audience with the Director of the State Theatre Oleka-Žilinskas."]

<sup>190</sup> "Iš Pasikalbėjimo su „Hamletu“ Režisierium M. Čechovu." 7 *Meno Dienos* 85 1932: 3.

<sup>191</sup> The original is crossed out with the alteration written aside in pencil. Petrauskas's copy of the *Hamlet* text, NLALA, 8.

what he didn't know.'<sup>192</sup> With this in mind, the Kaunas Hamlet becomes 'filled' with moral responsibility by the apparition of his father, just like in Chekhov's Schemes of Creation the actor's body becomes 'filled' with the inner, spiritual substance, out of which all his/her actions and expressions arise. Chekhov illustrates this in his assertion that Hamlet's actions arise directly from the spiritual world represented by the ghost of his father.<sup>193</sup> In contrast, the Queen, whose character is open for interpretation, as far as her identity as Hamlet's mother is concerned, is associated with the opposite materialistic, "evil" side. In Petrauskas's script, next to her lines regarding the dead Ophelia, "farewell! I hoped thou shouldst have been my Hamlet's wife", is pencilled in "a cry, but a fake one".<sup>194</sup> What the adapted text shows is that everyone, bar Horatio, was against Hamlet, and his determination to return the moral order was a fight of martyrdom.

From the very beginning Chekhov was concerned with forming the State Theatre actors into a coordinated ensemble (hence the type and function of the group exercises discussed in Chapter 1). The mediocrity of the actors, however, at times posed problems for Chekhov's ideas. In a letter to his long-term friend and benefactor, Georgette Boner, Chekhov complains about the 'weak' actors at the theatre.<sup>195</sup> Indeed, the critics did not fail to detect that the actors were not completely fulfilling the ambition of Chekhov's direction, as one refers to them as 'some better, some worse - [some] have demonstrated enunciated speech, and precise plasticity of gesture, and synced rhythmic movement.'<sup>196</sup> Still, Chekhov was adamant to achieve what he had outlined in his classes. In a magazine interview, he reiterated the principles of his own acting system that opposed not only the epic expressions of Lithuanian performers, but also Stanislavski's method of experiencing. 'Our overall goal', Chekhov stated, 'is to replace emotional acting with the rhythmic one.'<sup>197</sup> As discussed in the previous chapter, rhythm,

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<sup>192</sup> 'открывает Гамлету то, что до этого было ему неизвестно'. Кнебел'. *Vsia Zhizn'* 118.

<sup>193</sup> "Iš Pasikalbėjimo su „Hamletu“ Režisierium M. Čechovu." *7 Meno Dienos* 85 1932: 3.

<sup>194</sup> Petrauskas's copy of the *Hamlet* text, NLALA, 8. For the original lines see Shakespeare. *Tragedies* 363.

<sup>195</sup> 'сложно работать со здешними слабыми актерами.' 1932. Letter quoted in Byckling 162. Original held in the archive of Georgette Boner, Zurich.

<sup>196</sup> Vikt. Meirūnas. "Hamletas (M. Čechovo Pastatymas)." *Vairas* 11 1932: 212 (annual volume). Print. ["Hamlet (Production of M. Chekhov)."]

<sup>197</sup> "Iš Pasikalbėjimo su „Hamletu“ Režisierium M. Čechovu." *7 Meno Dienos* 85 1932: 4.

founded on the concepts of the spiritual dominating the physical, for Chekhov was the force in the actor's outward form. In *Hamlet*, the application of rhythm provided even weak actors with a technique akin to inspiration. This approach instigated in the ensemble coherence and unity, which were mostly utilised in the play's successful mass scenes. Indeed, the art critic A. Budrys describes the dancing at the King's palace, the defence of the King during Hamlet's attack, and other fight scenes as 'spectacles permeated with style', supporting his statement that 'Chekhov is the master of the mass scenes.'<sup>198</sup> As mentioned above, Chekhov arrived to Kaunas driven by a possibility to get closer to the theatre of the future. As far as this ideal was concerned in directing, developing a collaborative ensemble was the first step towards achieving it.

For Chekhov, the quality of harmony had to permeate the presentation as well. The stage design and music had to complement, and add to, the moral and philosophical tendencies of the play, for which the director invited Mstislav Dobuzhinsky to do the stage decorations. The Russian-born artist had studied in and travelled across the Western Europe. However, his most prominent connections were with the *Mir Iskusstva (World of Art)* magazine group of the artists, whose most distinguished feature was reworking and readapting the past forms of art.<sup>199</sup> Chekhov first met Dobuzhinsky in Moscow, and in his memoirs he describes how the composition of his decorations for Nemirovich-Danchenko's *Nikolai Stavrogin* impressed Chekhov by its beauty.<sup>200</sup> In Lithuania, stage design was in fact a relatively new profession at the time. Historians note how in the 1920s, during the first decade of the Lithuanian Kaunas State Theatre's existence, the programmes for the productions would sometimes list the director as the designer, since designing the stage set then only required establishing a believable setting for the play's production. Art historian Audronė Girdzijauskaitė states that only with Oleka-Žilinskas's 1929 revolutionary production of *Šarūnas* the theatre

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<sup>198</sup> A. Budrys. "Teatras. Hamletas." *Naujoji Romuva*. 23 Oct. 1932: 934 (annual volume). Print. ["Theatre. Hamlet." *The New Faith*].

<sup>199</sup> See Živilė Ambrasaitė. "Mstislavo Dobužinskio Scenografija Lietuvos Teatro, Muzikos ir Kino Muziejaus Rinkiniuose." *Mstislavas Dobužinskis: Scenografija Lietuvos Teatro, Muzikos ir Kino Muziejaus Rinkiniuose*. Vilnius: Vilniaus Dailės Akademijos Leidykla, 2006, 8. [*Mstislav Dobuzhinsky: Scenography in the Collections of the Lithuanian Museum of Theatre, Music and Cinema*].

<sup>200</sup> Adapted for the stage from Feodor Dostoyevski's novel *The Possessed*. 'Декорации в их композиции (...) - страшно красивы!' Chekhov 1: "Zhizn' i Vstrechi." 171.

started following a new path, ‘that of the director.’<sup>201</sup> Suddenly, partnership within the creative team and the cast was at the centre of the productions. The actor, with his/her previous function as an independent interpreter of the role, now became the ‘clay’ at the hands of the director, while the set designer emerged as the director’s right-hand person. The collaboration of Chekhov and Dobuzhinsky strengthened this distribution of functions, and the immediate seasons following *Hamlet* saw four leading stage designers, as well as others, regularly working with the directors on the scenery for the State Theatre productions.

Like Chekhov, Dobuzhinsky had worked with, and followed the same theatre ideals as, Stanislavski. In a letter to the author of the System, Dobuzhinsky declares (and this may well apply to Chekhov’s ideals): ‘I always remain Your loyal student in my works for theatre.’<sup>202</sup> Dobuzhinsky explains that he maintains harmony with directors because he approaches set designing from a director’s point of view, and, having mentioned the Kaunas *Hamlet* production, elaborates: ‘the psychological meaning has to be underlined in the set designed for every scene and action.’<sup>203</sup> Accordingly, Chekhov’s approach to the tragedy as the opposition of good and evil is personified by the colour palette composed by Dobuzhinsky. While the innocent Hamlet and Horacio were dressed in costumes dominated by modest grey and purple (see sketch of Hamlet, fig. 7, below), the rest of the characters were dressed in striking colours of black, gold, and above all red, indicating the spilled blood that they carry on their hands. In a magazine interview, Chekhov explains that the colours are meant to underline the ‘dominating passions’ in the tragedy.<sup>204</sup> The sketch of Hamlet’s costume features simple and easy flowing patterns, which are suggestive of his humbleness. By contrast, Solovjova-Olekienė’s Queen (fig. 8, below) is clad in metal, pearl and diamond apparel, with gloomy raven-black hair, and demonic make-up. The sinned Queen is burdened by the materialistic, stone-cold indicators of her status

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<sup>201</sup> Audronė Girdzijauskaitė 1: “Scenografijos Ištakos ir Srovės.” 241. [“Sources and Currents of Scenography“].

<sup>202</sup> ‘остаюсь всегда Вашим верным учеником в моих театральных работах.’ Letter dated 29 July 1929, published in Mstislav V. Dobuzhinskiĭ. *Pis’ma*. Ed. Chugunov, G. I. Sankt Peterburg: Dmitriĭ Bulanin, 2001, 227.

<sup>203</sup> Interviews with Dobuzhinsky in “M. V. Dobužinskis – Dekoratorius.” 7 *Meno Dienos* 90 1933: 5. Print [“M.V. Dobuzhinsky – Decorator”]; “Pas M. Dobužinskį.” 7 *Meno Dienos* 85 1932: 5. [“An Audience with M. Dobuzhinsky.”]

<sup>204</sup> “Iš Pasikalbėjimo su „Hamletu“ Režisierium M. Čechovu.” 7 *Meno Dienos* 85 1932: 4.

and riches that depress any signs of humanity and kind-heartedness she once might have had.



Figure 7.



Figure 8.

Dobuzhinsky coloured the floor and the backdrops in various shades of red, as if to suggest that the evil has spread in the home of Hamlet (see his sketch of the set in fig. 9, below). The patterns of wounding snake and dragon-like print on the backdrops, the royal throne and the King's gown (fig. 6, above), reinforce this by assimilating a milieu of Hell. As standard in the methods of *Mir Iskusstva*, Dobuzhinsky derived the various patterns and symbols featured in the decorations from the historic folk and other art sources, and harmoniously integrated them in the contemporary production. The morals in the performance cease to hide behind the historical plot and are reinforced to appeal to the present audiences. The elaborated, symbolic decorations in Chekhov's Kaunas *Hamlet* illustrate the complete utilisation of imagination that most likely contributed to the happiness of not acting in Kaunas, expressed by Chekhov in the aforementioned statement.





Figure 9.

While Chekhov's interpretation of *Hamlet* was meant to reflect his search for the theatre ideal, the press did not accept it on the ground that the production treated Shakespeare in an unorthodox way. This was a criticism directed at the emerging new type of director whose priority is not the recitation of the text, but a conscientious interpretation of it. In retaliation to the critics' attacks about the vast cuts in *Hamlet*'s text Chekhov advocated this new role of the director, one that echoed the stance of Oleka-Žilinskas, and foreshadowed the future success of some of the Drama Studio's most talented pupils. 'The task of the director, and his right', Chekhov argues in a newspaper article, 'is to take and underline that inner line, which he holds to be the most important in a said moment and in a said troupe. I have produced *Hamlet* four times already, and expressed a different inner line every time.'<sup>205</sup> Indeed, in the Second MAT production Chekhov's Hamlet character was less of a prince and more of a warrior, who believed that bloodshed was justifiable to cleanse the humanity of its vices, while in Paris the protagonist was the audience's contemporary, a possessed man, evoking the loneliness of the present, materialistic world. In Riga, Chekhov's portrayal of Hamlet changed as the play progressed onstage, as if his nervous, weak body was inflamed from within by the apparition of the ghost and by the actions it instigated;<sup>206</sup> while in Kaunas

<sup>205</sup> Interview by J. R-is. "Režisierius Čechovas apie Savo Pastatymus Mūsų Valstybės Teatre." *Lietuvos Aidas* [Kaunas] 13 Mar. 1933. Print. ["Director Chekhov on his Productions at Our State Theatre." *The Lithuanian Echo*]

<sup>206</sup> See Rudnitsky 114, and Vyckling 146, who quotes a critic: «(...) принца (...) нервно (...) играл сам Чехов.» [...] Гамлет меняется по ходу действия, «борец в слабом теле воспламеняется внутри»'.

Oleka-Žilinskas's *Hamlet* embodied the very epitome of the moral fight between good and evil. Staying loyal to Stanislavski's belief that every role ought to be conceived and developed like a living being, Chekhov confidently maintains his stance as he notes: '[w]e understand *Hamlet* dynamically, and some of our opponents understood it statically. (...) for us *Hamlet* is a live entity.'<sup>207</sup>

However, despite this contemporary interpretation not featuring any devices that could be conceived as a threat to the nation's ideology, Chekhov's nationality nevertheless instigated a wide-spread paranoia in the Lithuanian press. The critics held sway over the general choices of the public when it came to the new productions, book releases and concerts - especially due to the unstable political climate produced by foreign threat and the irregularities in independent Lithuania's government (the established power had been overthrown by the nationalists). The question of national identity was at the forefront of the subjects discussed in the press, and it was the job of the critics to impose its importance upon the public.

For the press, the reform of the State Theatre was a domestic affair, and as far as they were concerned, it was only valid if its instigators came from the native talent stock. The critics maintained a view that the inability of the national dramatists to create works that would appeal to their public, and therefore renovate the stagnating national theatre, was due to the fact that 'our theatre does not feel enough the spirit of the Lithuanian nation, its calling and its mission.'<sup>208</sup> According to their views, the State Theatre is doing nothing to change the situation as it does not resist foreign influence, and what is worse, 'strengthens it' by inviting Chekhov. While Byckling found that the Lithuanian Russophone critics mostly agreed on Chekhov's innovative direction,<sup>209</sup> the Lithuanian-language press was apprehensive. The fear of Russification encouraged

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<sup>207</sup> "Režisierius Čechovas apie Savo Pastatymus Mūsų Valstybės Teatre." *Lietuvos Aidas* 13 Mar. 1933.

<sup>208</sup> E. B-šis. "Teatro Sezoną Pabaigus." *Naujoji Romuva* 19 June 1932: 597 (annual volume). Print. ["Having Concluded the Theatre Season."]

<sup>209</sup> 'Литовско-русские критики (...) писали о смелом новаторстве Чехова-режиссера'; Byckling summarises, for example, that apart from 'some arguable moments in the actors' expressions and directing, the artistic achievements of [Chekhov's *Hamlet*] were undeniable' and the Russian newspaper *Litovskii Golos* 'called the *Twelfth Night* a new major theatrical success.' 'Несмотря на некоторые спорные моменты в игре актеров и режиссуре, художественные достоинства постановки были бесспорными.'; '«Литовский голос» называла «Двенадцатую ночь» новым крупным успехом театра.' Byckling 164, 173.

a proliferation of the exclusively Lithuanian identity, which attempted to isolate the State Theatre from what was conceived as ideological threat of foreign theatre innovators.

In point of fact, the Lithuanian theatre was above all in need of a theatre reform that would alter and increase its existing artistic standards. Speaking about the truth on stage, the most prominent of Lithuania's theatre critics Balys Sruoga criticises the nation's tendency to judge the capability of a director not by his artistic abilities, but by the feigned assurance of the quantity of the productions. He refers to this reliance on the collected conventional methods as a 'system of making pancakes'.<sup>210</sup> 'A pancake', Sruoga explains, 'is a good thing (...). But if one had to feed on them all their lives (...) [one would become] an invalid.' Prior to the arrival of Oleka-Žilinskas, the Kaunas State Theatre was indeed a pancake-making machine. Borisas Dauguvietis, who worked without a system and sometimes also 'in a rush and uncreatively', directed 38 plays for the State theatre during a mere 5 years between 1925 and 1930.<sup>211</sup> One of his acting class students, Elena Bindokaitė, has described being taught by Dauguvietis 'like there is some kind of cloth covering my eyes that should certainly be removed'.<sup>212</sup> This was later done, she remarks, by the classes of Oleka-Žilinskas. Similarly, another prominent director and actor of the State Theatre, Konstantinas Glinskis, believed that the actor is the creator of the play and the director is only there to assist him, resulting in banalities in the performers' expression and lack of coordination onstage.<sup>213</sup> Reflecting on the conventionality of the two directors, the Lithuanian theatre historian, Rasa Vasinauskaitė, adds that any new ideas were struggling to get through to the State Theatre, and the fault for this state of affairs was not only attributed to the directors, but to the press who understood theatre in a very conventional way.<sup>214</sup> 'It was precisely the conservatism of the "old" directors

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<sup>210</sup> Balys Sruoga. "Pastabos apie Tiesą ir Sceną." *Apie Tiesą ir Sceną: Straipsniai apie Teatrą*. Vilnius: Scena, 1994, 157. ["Comments on the Truth and the Stage." *On the Truth and the Stage: Articles on Theatre*].

<sup>211</sup> Rasa Vasinauskaitė. "Konstantino Glinskio, Antano Sutkaus, Boriso Dauguviečio Režisūros Bruožai." *Girdzijauskaitė 1*: 180 – 184. ["The Directing Traits of Konstantin Glinskis, ..."]; information on the creative team and cast of the State Theatre productions in a collection of the programmes for the premieres published by the LMTMC under the title *Lietuvos Dramos Teatrų Spektaklių Programos 1920-1940*. Vilnius, 1994, 22 – 45.

<sup>212</sup> "Oleka-Žilinskas." Rasa Andrašiūnaitė, ed. *Teatralų Atsiminimai apie A. Oleką-Žilinską, B. Dauguvietį, R. Juknevičių*. Vilnius: Scena, 1995, 25 – 26. [*Theatre Professionals' Memories on A. Oleka-Žilinskas,...*]

<sup>213</sup> See Vasinauskaitė. "Konstantino Glinskio, ...." *Girdzijauskaitė 1*: 194 .

<sup>214</sup> *Ibidem* 194 – 205.

[Dauguvietis, Glinskis]', she believes, 'that encouraged the young ones to look for new paths.' These new paths mostly led abroad, or in the case of 1930s Kaunas, were brought from there by Oleka-Žilinskas and Chekhov.

Chekhov was isolated; he was not only the sole non-Lithuanian director at the State Theatre at the time, but also the sole foreign director since the formation of this first official theatre in Kaunas in 1920. As the State Theatre stood at war with the press, the press were nevertheless struggling to conceal that their aversion to Chekhov's productions did not fully represent the opinion of the Lithuanian public. The viewers, having read of the prominence of Stanislavski's MAT and its students in culture newspaper and magazine articles, were intrigued by Chekhov's experiments. The following remark made about the number of people attending the performances of his *Hamlet* illustrates a typical traditionalist criticism that negates its own reliability: '[y]esterday the theatre was again full to the brim. It means that the part of the public, which (...) is not looking (...) to find strong spiritual sensations (...) will be loyal customers to this *Hamlet*.'<sup>215</sup> The writer is discomfited by the unfamiliarity of the coordinated mass scenes, decorations and a novel interpretation of the text. The commenced reform in acting and style was watched eagerly by the public whose attendance was not, unfortunately, credited to the creative team or cast of the production, but rather blamed on the lack of taste.

The amateur and dogmatic standards of the critics displayed just to what extent such reformists as Chekhov and Oleka-Žilinskas were needed. The inclination for familiar clichés and sensationalism is displayed by the amateurish standards of the press that mirror the habits Oleka-Žilinskas wanted to banish from the State Theatre when he first took on its directorship. This shows in the common displeasure that the ghost of Hamlet's father was not represented by an actor under a cloak, realistically, but left invisible to some who failed to notice its representation, achieved by the effects of lights and sounds:

In the opinion of Shakespeare and the majority of the viewers, the spirit should have been there. Sometimes one gets an impression that the world of ghosts is only a product of the

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<sup>215</sup> Vikt. Pr. "Ketvirtas „Hamleto“ Vaidinimas." *Lietuvos Aidas* 11 Nov. 1932. Print. ["The Fourth Performance of *Hamlet*."]

brain's functions. Theatre is creating an artistic reality of a new kind, and it does not have to answer to some of the opinions of the faculty of medicine.<sup>216</sup>

This method was one of many stylistic and production factors, among the mass scenes, scenography, and others, that encouraged Sruoga to describe Chekhov's *Hamlet* as a 'considerable height in the evolution of [Lithuanian] theatre'.<sup>217</sup> The substandard competency of the critics, therefore, leads to believe that the production was indeed an artistic achievement, so much so that it stood beyond the understanding of those settled in conventions.

Chekhov also had to answer for 'dressing [*Hamlet*] up in expressionism', as various critics termed his concern for the quality of form in acting and production.<sup>218</sup> This refers to the abstract décor and costumes of Dobuzhinsky, as well as the composition of the actors onstage and their rhythmic, constructed movements. After all, before Socialist Realism became the official means of state propaganda in Soviet Russia in the 1930s, dynamic compositions and colours of constructivist approach to arts dominated the field. The columnists suggested that it was better not to show such an adaptation because due to the loss of the text and the formalism of the production it looked like form with no supporting content. While they agreed that the actors were good in what was demanded of them by the style, such as plasticity and maintaining an ensemble, it was as if behind the grand exterior of *Hamlet* stood a conceived threat from the concealed Soviet propaganda. The coordinated mass scenes, for example, were assumed to carry proletarian connotations. Despite the fact that most of the renowned Lithuanian theatre directors and actors at the time, such as Dauguvietis and Glinskis, were all educated in drama schools of pre-revolutionary Russia, it was the newcomers from the socialist Russia, who spoke of (and implicated) change, that posed a threat to the national identity. Even V. Solovjova-Olekienė, who was invited from Moscow to play the Queen, was referred to as an 'outsider' despite

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<sup>216</sup> A. Budrys. "Teatras. Hamletas." *Naujoji Romuva* 23 Oct. 1932: 934.

<sup>217</sup> Sruoga. "Mūsų Teatro Raida" 238. ["Chronicle of our Theatre"].

<sup>218</sup> Vikt. Meirūnas. "Hamletas (M. Čechovo pastatymas)." *Vairas* 11 1932: 212; Vikt. Pr. "„Hamletas“. Vakarykščios Premjeros Proga." *Lietuvos Aidas* 12 Oct. 1932: 2. ["*Hamlet*. On the Occasion of Last Night's Premiere."]

learning Lithuanian for the part, with at least one writer questioning why she was included in the production.<sup>219</sup>

While the ballet and opera were staffed with foreign (mostly Russian) artists, it was not deemed appropriate to rely on them in drama. As opposed to the traditional comfort that was guaranteed in the classical dance and music arts, drama represented a talking mirror of the contemporary society. The national press valued theatre precisely for its function to depict the everyday reality, and expected every production to reflect the issues that concern the fundamentally Lithuanian realities. Chekhov's *Hamlet*, on the other hand, abandoned naturalistic representation and addressed the contemporary audience *through* theatricality. Actors' skills in rhythmic movement and the exuberant stage design were unfortunately seen by a lot of the critics as unwelcome experiments that failed to contribute to the specifically Lithuanian theatre development. This fate appeared to have changed during Chekhov's next production in Kaunas.

### THE TWELFTH NIGHT

Shakespeare's farcical comedy premiered at the State Theatre on 14 March 1933, four months after the beginning of the rehearsals.<sup>220</sup> Chekhov chose the comedy due to the play's demands on the actors and the potential in training a successful ensemble. He explained that '[e]very serious theatre desires not only to act, but also to grow, to evolve.'<sup>221</sup> This echoes his earlier statement when, as quoted in Chapter 1, Chekhov explained his searching for the new theatre in terms of his inability to 'just act.' By returning to Shakespeare, the director was relying on the tasks presented by his plays to facilitate the development of his Drama class actors specifically. 'The advantage of Shakespeare', Chekhov tells in a newspaper interview, 'is that he takes the most extreme and sharpest experiences and solves them with such mastery that the actor is included into the virtuosity

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<sup>219</sup> V. B-nas. "Apžvalga." *Židinys* 10 1932: 292. ["Overview." *The Hearth*]

<sup>220</sup> V. Bičiūnas. ""Dvyliktoji Naktis"." *Židinys* 5-6 1933: 268 (annual volume). Print. ["*The Twelfth Night*"].

<sup>221</sup> "Režisierius Čechovas apie savo Pastatymus Mūsų Valstybės Teatre." *Lietuvos Aidas* 13 Mar. 1933.

[which] develops his mastery almost against his will'.<sup>222</sup> While with *Hamlet* the actors were tackling the demanding standards for psychological expression of an inner line of his interpretation, with *Twelfth Night* Chekhov demanded the highest technique in the form of movement. In both Riga and Kaunas (the Lithuanian production premiered a year after the Latvian opening night at the Russian Drama Theatre) Chekhov retained the same interpretation and stylistic demands featured in Shakespeare's comedy directed by him for Habima in 1930.<sup>223</sup> In all three renderings of the *Twelfth Night*, the director's chief concern was the actors' stylised movement onstage that he believed to be intrinsic to this play.<sup>224</sup>

To illuminate the vigour that the comedy contains, the director alludes to the German term "tänzerisch", by which the play appears to have been 'danced' by the author.<sup>225</sup> According to John Stevens's definition, this refers to a text written in a 'dance-like (...) style that carries the audience along with it.'<sup>226</sup> The humour, arising from Shakespeare's opposing traits of roughness and elegance, is driven to such an extreme by the plot and characterisation that the comedy ought to be acted in, Chekhov states, 'the spiritual and physical sense',<sup>227</sup> in other words, danced. Choreography and movement of the actors were based on improvisation and the dynamism of rhythmical movement, all to make the production more musical. The actors were required to maintain a vibrant cast by completely transforming their style, especially as some of them were given comical roles alien to their usual type. A principal tragic actor of the Lithuanian stage, Petras Kubertavičius, who played Orsino, became an effective 'graceful lover', while the melodramatic Elena Žalinkevičaitė, 'probably for the first time

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<sup>222</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>223</sup> Byckling notes that in Riga Chekhov staged, 'it seems, the Berlin version of the comedy'. '[В Риге] Чехов ставил, видимо, берлинскую версию комедии'. Byckling 138. Judelevičius states that Chekhov's production of the *Twelfth Night* in Kaunas reflected the direction he took with the comedy in Berlin and Ryga. Judelevičius. "Michailo Čechovo Režisūra Valstybės Teatre." *Girdzijauskaitė* 1: 158.

<sup>224</sup> Speaking about the production of the *Twelfth Night* with Habima, Chekhov states that 'lightness' of movement is one of the main conditions for a successful rendering of the comedy, while Byckling quotes a journalist reviewing the Riga production as full of 'live tempo, rhythm, magnificence, movement, laughter'; 'легкость в игре (...) является необходимым условием', Chekhov 1: "Zhyzn' i Vstrechi." 226. '«Чехов дал спектаклю живой темп, ритм, блеск, движение, смех».' Byckling 138. Original in Lev Maksim. *Segodnia* [Riga] 16 Mar. 1932.

<sup>225</sup> "Režisierius Čechovas apie savo Pastatymus Mūsų Valstybės Teatre." *Lietuvos Aidas* 13 Mar. 1933.

<sup>226</sup> John Stevens. *Words and Music in the Middle Ages: Song, Narrative, Dance and Drama, 1050-1350*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1986, 142.

<sup>227</sup> "Režisierius Čechovas apie savo Pastatymus Mūsų Valstybės Teatre." *Lietuvos Aidas* 13 Mar. 1933.

(...) played not herself but the scenic character [Olivia and its] form'.<sup>228</sup> The audiences and critics were now directly witnessing the fruits of Chekhov's innovative pedagogical work with the actors at the State Theatre's Drama Studio.



Figure 10.

Chekhov and his creative team interpreted the core of the *Twelfth Night* as living in the world of fantasy. However, even though the actors displayed articulated movements, they found it too difficult to execute wholesomely the form of the characters *acting out* another life. For this Chekhov required every movement and word to be permeated with rhythm and as it was new to them, the actors' performance at times appeared 'mechanical [and] "learned"'.<sup>229</sup> Nevertheless, due to the scenic design and the score following the same stylised approach, the play maintained 'an artistic unity' in the production overall. The playful stage set (see fig. 10, above) was designed by the Lithuanian artist and scenographer Stasys Ušinskas, who, similarly to Dobuzhinsky, mostly based his designs on modernising the classical lines and shapes. After studying in Lithuania, Ušinskas spent two years in Paris, where he attended the lessons of the modernist Fernand Léger and the Russian stage designer Aleksandra Ekster, who was also the former companion of Aleksander Tairov,<sup>230</sup> a master of theatricality. Especially fond of the heritage of the Greeks, the artist prioritised costume over decorations,

<sup>228</sup> J. Raustis. „Dvyliktoji Naktis.“ *Lietuvos Aidas* 15 Mar. 1933: 2. Print. [“The *Twelfth Night*.”]

<sup>229</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>230</sup> Girdzijauskaitė 1: “Scenografijos Ištakos ir Srovės.” 263 – 264.



and 'clear architectural lines' over colourful display.<sup>231</sup> The costumes and decorations for the *Twelfth Night* featured elaborate play on shapes and lines, as well as variation of material. As seen in figure 10, the rhythm demanded by the form dominates the stage in the alignment of the backdrops and furniture, and the way they direct the viewer's eye towards the three centralised pairs of figures downstage. While the stage elements playfully differ in their individual designs and placement, they are compositionally synced in repeated straight cuts of the material and the curves of the furniture. Playing on the traditional values of love relationships, Ušinskas dressed the women - Olivia (Elena Žalinkevičaitė), Maria (Antanina Vainiūnaitė) and Viola (Ona Kurmytė) - in costumes dominated by the fair colour white. The suitors - Sebastian (Bronė Kurmytė), Sir Toby Belch (Oleka-Žilinskas) and Orsino (Petras Kubertavičius) - in turn wore valiant uniforms of musketeers, reinforcing the playful theatricality of the classical romance comedy. As Chekhov stated, in contrast to his *Hamlet* production, the viewer here was encouraged not to get emotionally involved, to embrace the play 'along or above the theme'<sup>232</sup> - in other words, to dispassionately observe and judge the humour of the characters' dream-like behaviour. To illustrate this, Ušinskas designed the grandiose and boorish costume and beard of Sir Toby Belch (fig. 11, below, far right). The vigorous rhythm of Belch's persona flows throughout the mise-en-scène, featuring the barrels arranged in architectural "steps", with the largest one accompanying the authoritative body language of Oleka-Žilinskas's role.

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<sup>231</sup> Ušinskis interviewed by Telsp. Murma, in "Pasikalbėjimas su dail. S. Ušinskiu." 7 *Meno Dienos* 82 1932: 10. Print. ["A Conversation with the Painter S. Ušinskas"].

<sup>232</sup> "Režisierius Čechovas apie savo Pastatymus Mūsų Valstybės Teatre." *Lietuvos Aidas* 13 Mar. 1933.



Figure 11.

The stage design was seen as unusual and prompted many reviewers to question Ušinskas's vision. The critics did not favour the innovative technique of the actors changing and moving the mobile decorations onstage during their performance. One complained that the overall effect of this spelled 'an insufferable cramming [onstage], in which there was no coordination or scenic significance.'<sup>233</sup> However, this writer admitted that Ušinskas's 'decorative richness and fantastic combination of colours (...) made the acting itself more interesting.'<sup>234</sup> Other columnists maintained similar views, suggesting that the stage was too crowded for the actors to move freely, but that Ušinskas's design was still 'beautiful, rich in colour, charming'.<sup>235</sup> As stage design was still a relatively new profession in Lithuania, some reviewers' praises for the scenography of the *Twelfth Night* mark a big step in the contemporary understanding of theatre and its fundamental structure as a synthesis of various forms of art.

In terms of the acting standards in Chekhov's second production in Lithuania, the relatively inexperienced cast of the *Twelfth Night* received more critical attention than in his *Hamlet*. Lithuanian theatre historians outline how the '[e]xperimental nature of the production [the use of portable decorations and unrealistic depiction of the characters] and untraditional prompt form was hard to

<sup>233</sup> V. Bičiūnas. „Dvyliktoji Naktis.“ *Židinys* 5-6 1933: 269.

<sup>234</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>235</sup> J. Raustis. „Dvyliktoji Naktis.“ *Lietuvos Aidas* 15 Mar. 1933: 2.

tackle for a number of the actors.’<sup>236</sup> Despite noting the harmony and expressiveness of the cast, the majority of reviewers suggested that certain performers were not up to the standard required for the success of the comedy as devised by Chekhov. In his criticism of Kubertavičius’s performance as Orsino, V. Bičiūnas admits both the actor’s victory and defeat in the performance: ‘at first tender and indeed different to what we are used to seeing in him, towards the end (...) becomes again the same as we have known him from long time ago.’<sup>237</sup> Even though the actors were in need of more practice to maintain their stylised transformations, they had shown promising abilities that even surprised the national press. When interviewed, Chekhov stated that even though the production of the *Twelfth Night* did not meet his full expectations, the troupe had shown efforts in improving their form and proved that they were now an ‘established group’,<sup>238</sup> coordinated in their own style. The same critic, who here interviewed Chekhov, soon stated that the actors’ feel for their physical bearing onstage during the performance marks their ‘biggest advancement’, and the production shows ‘that our young drama theatre is on its way to achieve its own artistic profile.’<sup>239</sup> The situation in Kaunas was a reliving of the comedy’s staging in Riga, where, as Byckling notes, despite receiving praises from the audience and the directors of the National and the Russian Drama theatres for his portrayal of Malvolio, Chekhov also faced the inability of the Russian Drama actors to carry out his stylistic demands.<sup>240</sup> Not being able to rely on his own presence onstage to carry the production, in the Kaunas *Twelfth Night* Chekhov met one of the biggest challenges as a director, and therefore achieved one of his biggest successes considering the novice-like abilities of the Kaunas actors.

After the artistic achievements of the *Twelfth Night*, the majority of the press ceased putting all the blame on the artists for not displaying a certain affinity to the Lithuanian identity. Now answering to Oleka-Žilinskas’s aforementioned belief that the national identity in arts can only be established on

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<sup>236</sup> Judelevičius. “Michailo Čechovo Režisūra Valstybės Teatre.” *Girdzijauskaitė* 1: 165.

<sup>237</sup> V. Bičiūnas. “„Dvyliktoji Naktis”.” *Židinys* 5-6 1933: 270.

<sup>238</sup> “Režisierius Čechovas apie savo Pastatymus Mūsų Valstybės Teatre.” *Lietuvos Aidas* 13 Mar. 1933.

<sup>239</sup> J. Raustis. “„Dvyliktoji Naktis”.” *Lietuvos Aidas* 15 Mar. 1933: 2.

<sup>240</sup> ‘Исполнение Чеховым роли Мальволио [зрителей, директоры русского и Национального театрах] считали самой блестящей (...) карикатурой; [Стиль комедии] и требование (...) легкости оказались трудными для (...) актеров [русского театра]’. Byckling 138.

the foundations of a discerning population, the critics started to assume the same position. While during the run of *Hamlet* the opinions of the viewers were not regarded as relevant, in the reviews of the *Twelfth Night* the authors show awareness of the need for the public to be responsive and progressive in order to maintain a new artistic direction of the theatre. Chekhov's demanding standards for the production mark a clear opposition to the mannerisms of the Lithuanian performances prior to the arrival of the Second MAT students. 'For us', writes one journalist, 'lulled by the melodramatic acting "style", stylistic demands of this extent [of the *Twelfth Night*] at first appear like an alien thing (...) they require from the viewer a better taste.'<sup>241</sup> As the artistic reform at the State Theatre was progressively unfolding, the press became aware that in order to embrace the innovations that are transforming the biggest national stage and its actors, the public, including the critics, must also participate in its own cultural development. With the *Twelfth Night* Chekhov was widely accepted for his artistic achievements with the actors, with the critics appearing prepared to give a benefit of the doubt to his further plans at the theatre and the Drama Studio. Unfortunately, Chekhov's unexpected interpretation of Gogol's satire, his third and final Lithuanian production, was seen to have 'corrupted' the national stage.

### THE GOVERNMENT INSPECTOR

Chekhov was contracted at the Kaunas State Theatre until 31 July 1933, the date being almost two months before his premiere of Gogol's *Government Inspector* on the 26th of September. Byckling rightly notes that even before the premiere the situation of foreigners, 'especially of the Russian artists, has worsened so much in Kaunas, that Chekhov had already considered leaving Lithuania.'<sup>242</sup> Rumours of his imminent departure produced tensions among his enemies and colleagues alike. Having received a "Moscow" welcome to [his]

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<sup>241</sup> J. Raustis. „Dvyliktoji Naktis.“ *Lietuvos Aidas* 15 Mar. 1933: 2.

<sup>242</sup> 'Еще до премьеры «Ревизора» положение иностранцев, особенно русских художников, в Каунасе настолько ухудшилось, что Чехов уже тогда предвидел необходимость прекращения работы в Литве.' Byckling 181.

Khlestakov' in Riga<sup>243</sup> when Chekhov arrived to perform his famous rendition of Gogol's anti-hero in 1931, the actor-turned-director met a different fate in Kaunas. Judging from Chekhov's success in the roles of Hamlet and Malvolio performed in Latvia, as discussed above, and that of Khlestakov in 1931, it appears that his biggest asset in the eyes of the press and the public remained to be in the sphere of acting. While the political situation in Riga was also unstable, Chekhov nevertheless earned favour from the critics because he maintained his reputation by displaying his acting talent in the productions he directed. In Kaunas, on the other hand, he did not act in any of his productions, and the stark challenge to the naturalistic preconceptions in his vision of *The Government Inspector* gave the press a reason to outcast him.

In what he knew to be his last attempt to exercise the Kaunas State Theatre actors, Chekhov continued applying the methods he taught in the Drama classes to the rehearsals. From the very beginning of *The Government Inspector* production Chekhov made sure that the theatrical atmosphere of fear permeates the stage and its nineteenth century Russian provincial town setting. Juknevičius's notes from the rehearsals reveal that all the actors were told to maintain 'an attitude of "the approaching enemy".'<sup>244</sup> This mood darkens the humour of the play with expectations of a forthcoming doom. The inhabitants of a typified small town are presented as isolated, with distorted sense of values. For them, the predicted arrival of the government official is, as the rehearsal notes read, 'the only event in their lives'. The acute quality of the grotesque in the production is formed by their incongruous body language as they suspiciously 'look at each other, seeing who will betray whom first'.<sup>245</sup> As the town Mayor tells the news to the gathered group of men and women, he is 'looking around for the traitor.' Chekhov accentuates the reason for their paranoia by pointing at corruption, guilt and selfishness. The inhabitants are presented as deserving nothing more than the deceiving Khlestakov (who, after mistakenly being taken for the official, plays the situation to his advantage). The two depraved sides are aligned against each other

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<sup>243</sup> 'Рига оказала «московский» прием моему Хлестакову.' Chekhov 1: "Zhizn' i Vstrechi." 247.

<sup>244</sup> 'Все в смысле "враг приближается".' "Michailo Čechovo Repeticijų Užrašai ir Pastabos." 1933 MS. Eil. Nr. 47, A196/4, 5, archive of Michael Chekhov, LMTMC, 1. ["Notes from Michael Chekhov's Rehearsals."]

<sup>245</sup> 'единственный случай в их жизни'; 'Каждый на каждого смотрит, кто первый предаст. Городничий говорит известие, а сам ищет, кто жулик.' "Michailo Čechovo Repeticijų Užrašai ir Pastabos", LMTMC, 1.

in a war with no worthy cause. Juknevičius's notes read: 'Khlestakov and [his companion] Osip form one side of a fighting army, while the Mayor, his officials and their ladies, are the other.'<sup>246</sup> Chekhov was highly concerned with composition as is revealed in the notes from the rehearsals for act 2, in which Khlestakov is transformed from a hungry traveller into an admired figure by the town dwellers' paranoia alone. 'The composition of a good production', Juknevičius noted down, 'depends on any given place (...) being in correlation with each other'.<sup>247</sup> The performance was reliant on the atmosphere that arose from the juxtaposition of the opposing, but both morally unsound, sides, and the situations they produce. These arose from the conspiracies of the townsfolk on the one side and of Khlestakov and Osip on the other. Stuck in the time void of awaiting the doom of the inspector, the characters existed in an eerie atmosphere that complimented the grotesque. This mood and stylistics defied the distinction between delusion and reality in the production, and therefore challenged the audience's own comfortable sense of reality.



Figure 12.

<sup>246</sup> 'Хлестаков и Осип - это одна сторона борющихся вожаков, другая сторона - Городничий, его чиновники и дамы.' Ibidem.

<sup>247</sup> 'Композиция хорошего произв. заключается в том, что каждое место ... имеет всегда соотношения'. Ibidem.

For example, in figure 12, above, the constructed body language and the pattern of the actors onstage exaggerate the scheming natures of the residents. As they all bend towards the plotting finger of Bobchinsky (Stasys Merčaitis), the obsession that arises from the news of the government official's arrival pushes them down and visually isolates them in a typified crowd, synchronised by movement. Accordingly, the actors' performance was strongly permeated with collective rhythm,<sup>248</sup> one of Chekhov's most valued techniques for the art of acting. The behaviour of some of the male townsfolk, such as the Mayor (Kubertavičius) and the Judge (Antanas Mackevičius) was distorted by howling, pushing each other about onstage, slapping each other on the bottom, pushing their fists and *figas* under each other's noses.<sup>249</sup> Such striking behaviour encouraged some reviewers to compare the actors' 'culminating shouts' and movements, resembling the drawing of geometrical shapes, to Meyerhold's biomechanics.<sup>250</sup> Byckling points to Chekhov's praising article about Meyerhold's grotesque 1927 production of *The Government Inspector* and suggests that the former's foreign productions were influenced by the latter's stylised direction.<sup>251</sup> Indeed, Chekhov outlines there the form and content as 'the two most important factors of the theatre art', and supports Meyerhold (not Gogol) as the 'author' of his own production because he 'penetrated the content (...) not of [the play, but] (...) further (...) [i.e.] the content of the same world of images which had been penetrated by Gogol himself.'<sup>252</sup> Meyerhold's production, in fact, was influenced by Chekhov's earlier rendering of Khlestakov in Stanislavski's 1921 performance. Gromov recalls how Chekhov completely transformed the role, almost hypnotising

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<sup>248</sup> Journalist Alkis remarks: 'Chekhov's production is underlined with collective rhythm.' In „Revizorius“ ir kas toliau?" *Vairas* 11 1933: 344 (annual volume). Print. ["*The Government Inspector* and What Next?"].

<sup>249</sup> Фига (Russ.) - Lith. 'špyga', refers to a fist with the top of the thumb sticking out between the forefinger and the middle finger, and is a mocking gesture. The actors' behaviour is described in the above-quoted article, and by V. B. „Revizorius“ Valstybės Dramoje." *Židinys* 10 1933: 301 (annual volume). Print. ["*The Government Inspector* at the State Theatre"].

<sup>250</sup> Biomechanics is a constructivist acting technique, devised by Meyerhold, which concentrates on the plasticity of movement, rhythm, space etc. J. Mastis. „Revizorius." *Naujoji Romuva* 8 Oct. 1933: 812 (annual volume). Print. ["*The Government Inspector*."]

<sup>251</sup> 'режиссура Мейерхольда оказала влияние на зарубежные постановки Чехова.' Byckling 15.

<sup>252</sup> To the discontent of some of the public and critics, Meyerhold credited himself, not Gogol, as the author of the production; the originals of Chekhov's statements: 'о форме и о содержании как о двух важнейших факторах театрального искусства'; 'Он проник в содержание (...) не «Ревизора» (...) дальше (...) в содержание того мира образов, в который проникал и сам Гоголь.' Chekhov 2: "Postanovka "Revizora" v Teatre imeni V. E. Mejerchol'da." 89 – 90.

the audiences with the minute nuances of his speech.<sup>253</sup> His assistant remembers that when Chekhov was watching Meyerhold's production, the latter said to him: '[y]ou (...) revised the role of Khlestakov, and I decided to revise the whole of *The Government Inspector*'.<sup>254</sup> Just as Chekhov had transformed the familiar protagonist and thus challenged the viewer's interpretation, his Kaunas production confronted the common conception of what kind of world the classical play envisages.

For example, Khlestakov's ornamental body language (see fig. 13, below) arises from his becoming what the townsfolk have made of him, or, as Chekhov expresses in Juknevičius's rehearsal notes, '[his] birth out of nothing.'<sup>255</sup> The town's dignitaries surround the expressively seated visitor, just as they huddled upon the hearing of his arrival, and continue weaving him into whatever their minds see. Viktoras Dineika's Khlestakov is stylistically typified, and fictionalised, by his body language in figures 13 and 14, below. Both in his standing and sitting positions he maintains an identical pose, with one of his hands extended towards the town dwellers almost to the effect of awaiting them to honour it with a kiss, while his other hand is tucked into a pocket in a relaxing manner that accentuates the contrast in the worried, desperate residents.

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<sup>253</sup> 'слова вылетали у [Хлестакова-Чехова] как бы помимо воли. (...) [он] заставлял зрителей слушать неотрывно, почти гипнотически'. Gromov 92.

<sup>254</sup> 'Вы (...) ревизовали роль Хлестакова, а я вот решил ревизовать всего «Ревизора»'. Ibidem 95.

<sup>255</sup> 'Рождение Хлестакова из ничего.' "Michailo Čechovo Repeticijų Užrašai ir Pastabos", LMTMC, 2.



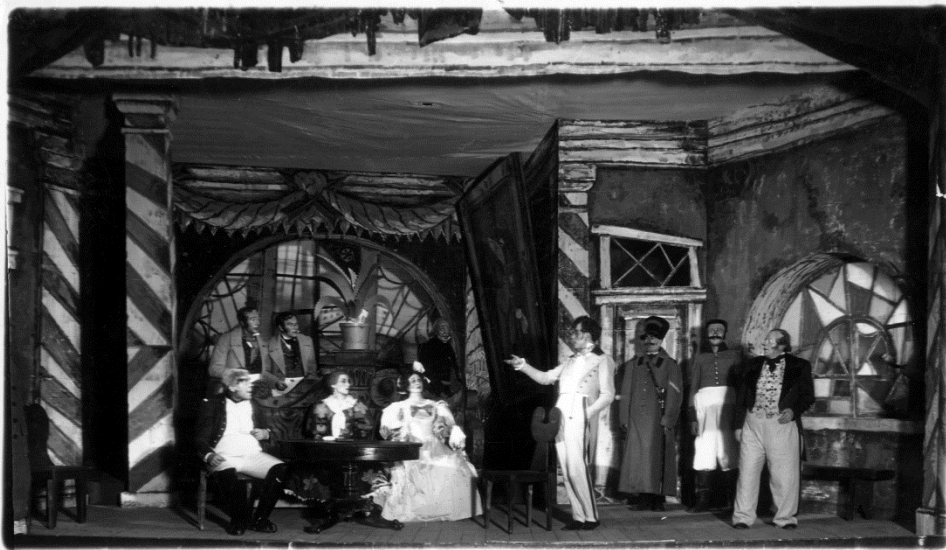


Figure 13.



Foto „ZINAIDA“ Kaunas

Figure 14.

To complement Chekhov's stylistic approach to the comedy, Dobuzhinsky's decorations provide a distorted and claustrophobic setting. Incorporating all the settings into one stage construction, the audiences were greeted by, in Chekhov's own words, the 'crowding, narrowness and murkiness' of the Mayor's room (fig. 12).<sup>256</sup> The crooked door and windows and the rusty uneven walls almost creak as

<sup>256</sup> Pulgis Andriušis. "Revizorius." *Lietuvos Aidas* 28 Sept. 1933: 2. Print.; 'Давка, теснота и полутемнота', "Michailo Čechovo Repeticijų Užrašai ir Pastabos", LMTMC, 1.

they close in on the inhabitants within. Figure 15, below, displays Dobuzhinsky's sketch for the 1927 P.F. Sharom production of *The Government Inspector* in Dusseldorf, which was a basis for stage decorations in Kaunas.<sup>257</sup> The textures and colours of wood complement the setting of a humble small town, while the intertwining colours playfully enhance the humorous cartoonish structure and furniture.



Figure 15.

Judging from Chekhov's memoirs, he was impressed by Dobuzhinsky's ability to synthesise the collaborations that make a performance, as he describes watching the artist paint on the canvas for *The Government Inspector*:

[t]hese lights and spots now not only live and vibrate, but also entertain! They tell me about the life of Anton Antonovich [the Mayor] with the humour of Nikolai Vasilyevich [Gogol] and the grin of Mstislav Valeryanovich [Dobuzhinsky]. There are no distortions, saying "laugh at this!" - everything is natural and simple'.<sup>258</sup>

An illustration of simplicity can be found even in the slightest alteration in figures 13 through to 14, where the painting of an official in a uniform gets progressively

<sup>257</sup> Unfortunately there are no drawings by Dobuzhinsky for the Kaunas *Government Inspector* at the LMTMC, but the design very much reflects that of the 1927 German production. See <http://www.invaluable.com/auction-lot/mstislav-valerianovich-dobuzhinsky-1875-1957-stag-tbcvqvzubu-220-m-c6tl7ep3m5>, 15 Jan 2011.

<sup>258</sup> 'Не только живут и вибрируют теперь эти таинственные блики и пятна, но они и смешат! Они рассказывают мне о жизни Антона Антоновича, да еще с юмором Николая Васильевича, да еще с усмешечкой Мстислава Валерьяновича. Нет никаких искажений, дескать: «смейтесь!» - все натурально и просто'. Chekhov 1: "Zhizn' i Vstrechi." 257.

lowered to an effect of a crumbling structure over those in the room. The costumes also maintained authenticity to the characterised features in detail. The Mayor's wife and daughter, Teofilija Vaičiūnienė's Anna Andeyevna and Teklė Daubaraitė's Maria Antonovna, for example, desperately fighting for the attention of the esteemed Khlestakov, are dressed in elaborate folds and oversized head decorations (see figs. 12-14). The desired prospect of marriage and their love for the good life shine in the colour white, while their constant pairing exaggerates and humours their fortune-seeking intentions. This was done because for Dobuzhinsky Chekhov's production of stylised, deluded characterisations was a satire that encompassed 'the stagnation of the province, overall'.<sup>259</sup> Through theatricality an alternative view of reality was presented - not for identification with, but for revelation of what lurks beneath it.

The play's crumbling social and scenic structures confirm Chekhov's interpretation of Gogol's text as one that denies conventionality in the presentation of the classical texts. In the words of a Lithuanian scenography historian, Chekhov's novel take on *The Government Inspector* encompassed the 'grotesque, with elements of phantasmagoria and the fantastic'.<sup>260</sup> Expecting to find 'the cheery Gogol' the audiences were instead presented with what some thought to be a 'disgusting' interpretation of the comedy.<sup>261</sup> The production challenged the conservative clichés that surround what was perceived by the Lithuanian viewers as authentic staging of classical texts (reminding of the furore surrounding Chekhov's cuts in *Hamlet*). Chekhov's views on classical texts are most elaborated in his 1928 article, where he discusses how the traditional approach to the staging of the classics undermines their value.<sup>262</sup> There he outlines that only when classical texts are freed from these conventions can their great potential and contemporary relevance be maximised. The various inner lines of *Hamlet* that Chekhov concentrated on can be presented as another example.

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<sup>259</sup> 'сатира на затхлость провинции **вообще**', Добужинский, М. "О Постановке „Ревизора“ в Литовском Госуд. Театре." *Segodnia* [Riga] 16 Oct. 1933: 6. Print.

<sup>260</sup> Girdzijauskaitė 1: "Scenografijos Ištakos ir Srovės." 259.

<sup>261</sup> Pulgis Andriušis. "Revizorius." *Lietuvos Aidas* 28 Sept. 1933: 2; Alkis. "„Revizorius“ ir kas toliau?" *Vairas* 11 1933: 344.

<sup>262</sup> 'традиция в постановке классиков (...) есть накопление мертвых (...) штампов [...] Нужно прежде всего освободиться (...) и тогда (...) окажется, что пьеса (...) обладает огромным количеством (...) возможностей и заключает в себе столько необходимого (...) по отношению к современности'. Chekhov 2: "Eshche o Klassikakh na Stsene." 98 – 99.

Throughout the three productions of the classical texts he focused on the originality and relevance of his interpretation to the contemporary society. Continuing in the attitude that underlined his lessons at the Drama class, Chekhov propagated the conscientious, as well as the creative, role of the theatre director.

Unfortunately, presented with distorted scenery and coarse characterisations, the press almost jumped at the opportunity to discard the ‘vulgarity’ of the Russian play. For them, the production did not represent the great author Gogol, and, blaming Chekhov, they branded his approach as low-class. ‘[T]o entertain those in “the gods” are gathered all the “winnings” of buffoonery, all the Russian extravagance, primitive style, that more likely reek of sunflower seeds and “samogon” [moonshine] than of art.’<sup>263</sup> In defence, Dobuzhinsky explains that the production ‘is built on an attentive inner approach to Gogol’s style and to the essence of comedy itself.’<sup>264</sup> Yet the rigid ideal of what Gogol should be not only halted any dialogue between the creative team of *The Government Inspector* and the critics, but was also used in the press’ nationalistic campaign to prove the production’s irrelevance to Lithuanians as a nation. The journalist V.B. declared that the production and even the text were not suitable for Lithuanians as both had ‘nothing to do with our lives’.<sup>265</sup> He added a pronouncement on the director’s nationality by describing the performance ‘fittingly’ as a “mertvechina”, a Russian word for lifelessness. A sense of assumed superiority dominates these comments because Chekhov’s opponents in the national press thought to have claimed a victory - he left Lithuania the day after the premiere of *The Government Inspector*, on 27 September 1933. In this context, the overwhelming negativity from the critics that surrounded the production owes largely to Chekhov’s departure being seen as his failure to function, as a foreigner, in Lithuania.

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<sup>263</sup> “The Gods” denotes the top level of the theatre auditorium, otherwise known as the gallery, which contains the cheapest seats in the house. Sunflower seeds indicate a custom common among the lower classes, which involves eating the seed and spitting the shell out onto the ground. While the habit is implied to be of Russian cultural origin, the sight of youths and older generations alike eating the seeds was just as common in Lithuania. The author of the comment is looking down on this habit as part of the ‘lower’ Russian culture. ‘Samagonas’, original Russ. *самогон*, means home-distilled vodka. V. B. “„Revizorius“ Valstybės Dramoje.” *Židinys* 10 1933: 301.

<sup>264</sup> ‘построена на внимательном внутреннем подходе к образам Гоголя и к существу самой комедии’, Добужинский, М. “О Постановк „Ревизора“ въ Литовском Госуд. Театр.” *Segodnia* 16 Oct. 1933: 6.

<sup>265</sup> Russ. original *мертвечина*, V. B. “„Revizorius“ Valstybės Dramoje.” *Židinys* 10 1933: 301.

Indeed, in her article on theatre criticism in Lithuania during the interwar years, Laura Blynaitė remarks that throughout the years when Oleka-Žilinskas and Chekhov worked at the State Theatre, ‘art began to be judged not by aesthetic criteria, but according to a certain ideology, a political conjecture.’<sup>266</sup> While the discussion so far has illustrated this situation, it has not yet dealt with the extreme anti-communist attitudes in the critics’ views on the coordinated acting orchestrated by Chekhov. Due to this, the actors in *The Government Inspector* were described in the press as ‘collectivist machines’.<sup>267</sup> It was here explained that their ability to maintain synchrony and communication during the mass scenes instigates ‘a certain tendency that injects communism.’ Following the stance against the actors being concerned with form and apparently failing to sustain content in Chekhov’s previous two productions, the press was now directly connecting his inclination for the collective ensemble with the socialist agitational propaganda common to his home country. The columnist J. Mastis declares that Chekhov’s artistic principles lied in the ‘grouping of mass scenes and the accentuating of physical action’ which were more suitable for the ‘communist agitational tribunes.’<sup>268</sup> While earlier he was met with some opposition on the grounds of foreign influence, with the production of *The Government Inspector* Chekhov was seen as an ideological threat. Increasingly insecure in her political situation, Lithuania’s biggest worry was the Soviet takeover, and the paranoia of the press reflected this in their suspicion towards socialist tendencies. Chekhov met a similar fate in Latvia, where he was forced out of theatre and out of the country after a pro-fascist takeover in 1934.<sup>269</sup>

The spoken language of the actors, which Chekhov subjected to Russian enunciation, increased the paranoia of Russification. Even though by this the director was striving to subjugate the Lithuanian language to the grotesque and thus embody through it the degenerated world of Gogol’s text, the press misunderstood Chekhov and believed that by applying Russian accent to their

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<sup>266</sup> Laura Blynaitė. “Lietuvių Tarpukario Režisūros Poslinkiai Teatro Kritikos Veidrodyje.” *Menotyra*. 45.4 (2006): 13. Web. 13 Mar. 2011. [“Improvements in the Lithuanian Interwar Direction Reflected in Theatre Criticism.” *History of Art*].

<sup>267</sup> Alkis. “„Revizorius“ ir kas toliau?” *Vairas* 11 1933: 344.

<sup>268</sup> J. Mastis. “„Revizorius“.” *Naujoji Romuva* 8 Oct. 1933: 812.

<sup>269</sup> ‘в Латвии совершился бескровный переворот (...) в пользу фашистов.’ Chekhov 1: “Zhizn’ i Vstrechi.” 262.

speech he was trying to “russify” the Lithuanian actors. ‘Chekhov’, reads one review, ‘not knowing the Lithuanian language, was unable to understand its spirit or its musicality, and tinted all the sentences with Russian intonation. When foreign directors are invited, they should at least be required to know the language.’<sup>270</sup> The tendency to call for native talents and reject anything non-Lithuanian became almost a jingoistic duty, which was encouraged by the press. Against this front stood the well-travelled artists like Chekhov, Oleka-Žilinskas and Dobuzhinsky, whose liberating attitudes of the universality of arts were seen as occupying forces. Speaking in a magazine article in June 1932, Dobuzhinsky lectured to those who were against inviting foreign artists, stating that such attitudes stand in the way of cultural progression. ‘Outside influences, he stated, (...) help to renew [national arts]’ because ‘the originality of every nation lies in (...) the combinations’ of forms, colours and so on.<sup>271</sup> This approach of synthesis, i.e. sourcing from various historical periods and art forms, echoes Stanislavski’s chief belief that theatre cannot be isolated, that intrinsically it is a collaboration of various media and forms occurring in life.<sup>272</sup> Unfortunately, even if Chekhov’s work during the three Kaunas productions yielded results in the fields of acting and style, the nationalistic attitude among the press questioned the value of his artistic vision. Agreeing that the actors in *The Government Inspector* showed ‘technique and professional progress’, J. Mastis, for example, added that ‘there wasn’t a lot of actual highly artistic creativity.’<sup>273</sup> Chekhov’s achievements were now being invalidated on the account that while he might be a good teacher, he had not done a lot for the Kaunas State Theatre in terms of the quality of the performances. (This of course refers to the quality that would be fitting to the critics’ idea of what the national theatre should be like, i.e. of no foreign influences.)

In fact, due to the demands placed on the actors, and the failure of some of them to achieve what Chekhov was asking for, made some journalists question his

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<sup>270</sup> Alkis. „„Revizorius“ ir kas toliau?“ *Vairas* 11 1933: 346.

<sup>271</sup> Dobuzhinsky speaking in “Kelios Mintys apie Tautinio Meno Kelius.” *Naujoji Romuva* 12 June 1932: 554 (annual volume) and 5 June 1932: 530 (annual volume). Print. [“Some Thoughts on the Paths of the National Theatre”].

<sup>272</sup> Speaking to beginner actors in 1918, Stanislavski states: ‘[l]earn to see, hear, love life- learn to carry this over into art, use it to fill out the image you create’. Hapgood 31.

<sup>273</sup> J. Mastis. „„Revizorius“.“ *Naujoji Romuva* 8 Oct. 1933: 812.

ability to direct. Sruoga noted that in both the *Twelfth Night* and *The Government Inspector* Chekhov ‘presented a very difficult and complicated form, which took all the strength of our actors [and] ran short of perfecting the content.’<sup>274</sup> Chekhov’s ability to direct and inspire the actors to achieve his vision overall falls under three general categories of opinion shared among past and contemporary artists and historians. The Lithuanian art historian Judelevičius believes that Chekhov’s three productions at the State Theatre were relatively successful as they ‘embedded conceptual directing, the initiator of which was Oleka-Žilinskas.’<sup>275</sup> Vaičiūnienė, having acted in the last two of Chekhov’s productions, describes him, Oleka-Žilinskas and Dauguvietis as the ‘three directors-giants’ whose hard work made the historians refer to the 1929-1935 period at the State Theatre as Lithuania’s ‘theatrical Renaissance’.<sup>276</sup> Byckling, on the other hand, discusses how the Habima theatre group refused to allow Chekhov to direct Karl Gutzkow’s *Uriel Acosta* instead of the *Twelfth Night* because ‘they thought that he could only rehearse what he had performed as an actor.’<sup>277</sup> She adds that ‘to this day Chekhov’s directing competence is open for discussion.’ Chekhov’s repetitive choice of the plays for his productions is thought to be a means for new ways of interpretation, a vehicle towards the theatre of the future. However, those who maintain the third stand, confirming Chekhov’s unquestionable competence to teach but not to direct, devalue this directing ambition of his by stating that the Kaunas plays were only average productions. Vytautas Maknys, a prominent Lithuanian theatre historian, suggests that the plays ‘helped to heighten the mastery of the actors’ but as, being a ‘great actor, [Chekhov] did not act in Lithuania, only directed, his talent did not shine through and his influence on the evolution of Lithuanian theatre was not distinct.’<sup>278</sup> In support of the point made above, regarding Chekhov not earning favour with the Lithuanian critics partly because he did not rely on his acting, the Latvian critics indeed supported Chekhov’s efforts. Byckling recounts that the press in Riga were mainly of the

<sup>274</sup> Sruoga. “Mūsų Teatro Raida.” 238.

<sup>275</sup> Judelevičius. “Michailo Čechovo Režisūra Valstybės Teatre.” *Girdzijauskaitė* 1: 176.

<sup>276</sup> Teofilija Vaičiūnienė. *Scena ir Gyvenimas*. Vilnius: Vaga, 1975, 132. [*Stage and Life*.]

<sup>277</sup> ‘в театре считали, что он может репетировать только то, что исполнял как актер. (...) режиссура Чехова до сих пор остается темой для дискуссий.’ Byckling 71.

<sup>278</sup> Vytautas Maknys. *Lietuvių Teatro Raidos Bruožai*. Vol. 2. Vilnius: Mintis, 1979, 115. [*The Traits of the Lithuanian Theatre Development*.]

opinion that Chekhov and Gromov's work with the Latvian actors 'produced excellent results', and herself summarises Chekhov's work in Riga in 1932 as an achievement, and his acting a success with audiences and the critics.<sup>279</sup> Nevertheless, for the first time in his career, in Kaunas Chekhov was not an actor. Through his work with the students and actors in Lithuania, he also did not limit himself to a specific role of a director, or a teacher. Throughout his career Chekhov aimed to be all of these, because for him limiting himself to one role did not constitute a conscientious and progressive theatre practitioner. Despite the cold reception of Chekhov's last production in Kaunas, it nevertheless concluded a fulfilment of this ideal. The obvious success in the conception and teaching the performers in his acting method could only be achieved with a clear and original direction. While not appearing in his Kaunas productions did not earn him the one aspect of favour it did in Latvia, Chekhov's success in Lithuania lay beyond the misconceptions of the press - with the actors who worked with him.

Following Chekhov's departure, Oleka-Žilinskas wrote to him informing of all the commotion surrounding his last production. Chekhov's reply, in support to the above, confirmed his trust that their work done in Kaunas had nevertheless germinated the seeds of a theatrical reform, especially because his last play put the State Theatre at the very centre of public debate. 'I am very glad', Chekhov noted, 'that they have not silenced the production [of *The Government Inspector*]! Maybe somebody will understand something about it'.<sup>280</sup> The discontented national press, however, continued to disregard Chekhov's legacy, notably toning down the nationalistic attitudes immediately after the departures of Chekhov, and later Oleka-Žilinskas. Sruoga remembers how after Oleka-Žilinskas had left 'all the voices about the need for national theatre were silenced' and the Kaunas State Theatre readily welcomed Russian ballet dancers and operas.<sup>281</sup> As mentioned earlier, in ballet and opera arts, foreigners and particularly Russian professionals populated the creative team and cast lists since the introduction of these arts in

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<sup>279</sup> 'Работа Чехова и Громова с латышскими артистами дала прекрасные результаты, писали критики.:'; 'Первый год работы в Риге [1932] принес Чехову (...) признание. (...) Все выступление Чехова собирали полные залы, получили (...) блестящие отзывы в прессе.' Вуклинг 148, 151.

<sup>280</sup> 'Я очень радуюсь, что [«Ревизора»] не замолчали! Может быть, что-нибудь до кого-нибудь дойдет'; letter dated 4 Oct. 1933, sent from Riga. First published in Chekhov 1: 412. Original manuscript held at LMTMC, archive of Michael Chekhov, Eil. Nr. 46, A196/2.

<sup>281</sup> Sruoga, "Mūsų Teatro Raida." 240 – 241.



Lithuania in the 1920s, for the benefit of the development of these arts. This hypocrisy demonstrates how the press was disconnected from the artistic needs of the Lithuanian national theatre. Instead of supporting the ensuing theatrical reform, the critics maintained a wide-spread hostility towards foreigners and believed that the current pressing issue in regards to drama arts was the ‘fate of the foreigners at our theatre.’<sup>282</sup> The press, being the influential opinion makers, refused to see any artistic merit in *The Government Inspector* and used the controversy that surrounded the production as a ‘proof that the State Theatre is indeed in need for revision. (...) The management of the theatre ignores the voice of the public and compromises itself in front of the nation.’<sup>283</sup> At that time, the discontent of the press started to reflect the intrigues and an increasing division among the State Theatre actors, mostly between the conservative older generation and the students of Oleka-Žilinskas and Chekhov’s Drama class. In the climate of 1933-1934 Lithuania (when the country particularly felt the political threat from Germany and Russia), the reforms of the First Studio innovators represented a risk to the now obsessive need to project a distinctly national ideology in the arts.

In February 1932, as a direction for the imminent theatre reform and conditions for the reviving of the State Theatre, the *Naujoji Romuva* magazine released Chekhov’s article about the theatre of the future entitled ‘Theatre is Dead - Long Live Theatre!’ It refers to how the word will be released from the naturalistic state, and gain spirituality, how the artist’s body will become an instrument, and overall how the replicating of everyday reality onstage, which stops theatre from evolving, will cease.<sup>284</sup> These values of true objectivity in performance, of escape from the confining everyday realism, and of artistically liberating dialogue with one’s soul and spirit were inscribed in Chekhov’s classes, discussed in Chapter 1. They were also the backbone for his productions, displayed in his concern for form, rhythm and ensemble in the actors’ performance. While before his arrival the Lithuanian theatre journalists had promoted Chekhov’s ideals as a favourable direction for a theatrical reform, they

<sup>282</sup> A. Braziulis. “Vadovybei Valstybės Teatre Besikeičiant.” *7 Meno Dienos* 98 1933: 4. Print. [“During the Management Change at the State Theatre.”]

<sup>283</sup> ‘Revision’ is a play on the original Russ. and Lith. title of *The Government Inspector*, *Revizor* and *Revizorius* respectively. J. Mastis. “„Revizorius“.” *Naujoji Romuva* 8 Oct. 1933: 812.

<sup>284</sup> Michael Chekhov. “Teatras yra Žuvs - Tegyvuoja Teatras!” *Naujoji Romuva* 7 Feb. 1932: 125 (annual volume). Print. Original “Le théâtre est mort! Vive le theatre!” Chekhov 1: 127 – 132.

became differently inclined when the State Theatre started functioning in his methodology. The press were here considered in order to outline how significant Chekhov's productions were contextually, as well as artistically. It appears, however, that the difficult political and cultural situation in Lithuania at the time deemed the critics as out of tune with the bigger picture, with what the national Lithuanian theatre could have profited from at its young age. It was the development of the actors Chekhov worked with that best overcomes the difficulties presented from analysing his reception by the national press. Most of them, to use Teofilija Vaičiūnienė's (who took part in his last two productions) opinion as an example, believed that Chekhov's arrival was indeed 'significant to Lithuanian theatre'.<sup>285</sup> This disposition was particularly passionately maintained by the young student actors whose work will be discussed in the following chapter.

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<sup>285</sup> Vaičiūnienė. "Andrius Oleka-Žilinskas." *Andrašiūnaitė* 59.

## CHAPTER III

### THE LEGACY OF MICHAEL CHEKHOV IN DEVELOPING THE LITHUANIAN STAGE

#### AFTER CHEKHOV'S DEPARTURE

In the period between 1935 and 1940, after the departure of Chekhov and Oleka-Žilinskas, the gap between the old and the new generations at the Kaunas State Theatre was greater than ever. For the first time since the opening of the theatre in 1920 it was witnessing the maturing graduates of the Drama Studio taking a stand against the conservative dogma, which was threatening to overstep the retrospect of the artistic reforms applied in the early 1930s. The contemporary Lithuanian theatre historian, Irena Aleksaitė, singles out Romualdas Juknevičius (1906-1963) and Algirdas Jakševičius (1908-1941), who studied under the supervision of Oleka-Žilinskas and Chekhov, as the artistic debutants that ‘followed on the fruitful searches of their teachers’ conceptual direction and new principles of working with the actors’.<sup>286</sup> Juknevičius and Jakševičius were the most ambitious students of the masters, taking concise notes during their classes and from very early in their careers displaying a conscientious outlook towards theatre. Jakševičius acted in all three of Chekhov’s Kaunas productions, playing Francisco in *Hamlet*, a servant in the *Twelfth Night*, and one of the town’s inhabitants, Rastakovskiy, in *The Government Inspector*. Juknevičius played Guildenstern in *Hamlet* and a fellow servant to Jakševičius in the *Twelfth Night*. The two young artists were the very epitome of what Chekhov expected the Kaunas Drama Studio actors to become, culturally aware and set on taking the Lithuanian theatre towards its future. Compared to other directors in Lithuania, Juknevičius and Jakševičius were artistically advanced and very much in tune with the theatrical direction promoted by Stanislavski and developed by the First Studio

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<sup>286</sup> Irena Aleksaitė. “Režisūros Problemos.” *Girdzijauskaitė* 2: 17. [“Problems in Directing.”]

innovators such as Chekhov. Since the attempted reforms in the 1930s, there were no other significant attempts to renovate the stagnating national theatre in Lithuania. It was those taught in foreign artistic disciplines and countries who presented themselves with the challenge of advancing the Lithuanian theatre forward.

In my discussion below, Chekhov's influence on the artistic development of the two young directors is discussed as part of a wider reformatory movement that arose from challenging and building up on Stanislavski's ideas. Commenced at the First Studio, this theatrical advancement first saw Vakhtangov developing the System, and later Chekhov and Oleka-Žilinskas individually evolving from Stanislavski's ideals their own methods of acting and directing.

#### KAUNAS STATE THEATRE IN THE 1930s

After Chekhov and Oleka-Žilinskas left Kaunas, the State Theatre was reverted to the state of affairs that was common before their arrival. For the new generation of theatre professionals, the return to the traditional old ways of melodramatic expressions and rushed productions was disappointing and paralysing.<sup>287</sup> As a response to this, in 1934, Juknevičius spoke of his ambition to lift the professional level of the hopeful actors at the newly established Youth Theatre (commonly known as the Youths). This organisation was led by Oleka-Žilinskas and functioned as part of the Lithuanian Theatre Association in 1933-1934. It was made up of the latter's former students and young State Theatre actors. The Youth Theatre produced only two plays, Harriet Beecher-Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in 1933 and Sruoga's *In a Shadow of a Giant* in 1934. They were both directed by Oleka-Žilinskas and received as exemplary in the ensemble, unity

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<sup>287</sup> Jurgis Blekaitis suggests that the 'good old days' returned for the veteran directors and the older actors who were happy that the competition of artistic flamboyance of 'Hamlets' has disappeared, see *Algirdas Jakševičius-Teatro Poetas*, Vilnius: Lietuvių Literatūros ir Tautosakos Institutas, 1999, 153. [*Algirdas Jakševičius-Theatre Poet.*]

of style and fresh youthfulness of the productions.<sup>288</sup> Unfortunately, the Youths broke up due to a complete lack of financial support from the government, and the most ambitious young Lithuanian actors failed to develop into a modern and artistically innovative alternative to the deep-set ways of the State Theatre.

The situation appeared to have been worsening by the year as in 1935, having lost Oleka-Žilinskas, Chekhov and the Youths, the crisis at the State Theatre was declared by the critics who seemed to have reached ‘the point of culmination’.<sup>289</sup> They blamed, ironically, the lack of ‘strong artistic management’ and absence of the ‘ensemble of creative spirit’, the qualities that both Oleka-Žilinskas and Chekhov brought to the theatre. A couple of years later, the democratic journalist and writer J. Keliuotis defined the State Theatre’s lack of enthusiasm and creative courage as its ‘cancer’.<sup>290</sup> Under the heading of *Towards the New Theatre*, he frequently quotes Chekhov’s views that form the basis of his concept for Lithuania’s own theatre of the future. This is history repeating itself, to recall Chekhov’s article *Theatre is Dead*, offering some constructive directions for an artistic reform (see Chapter 2). His theories were again presented as the means of solving the problems in the national theatre. In Keliuotis’s article, Chekhov’s words draw on the collective efforts to save the theatre, on the view that actors’ bodies are creative material and ought not to copy everyday reality, and that a play has a spirit, soul and body (a direct extraction from Chekhov’s aforementioned letter on the theatrical atmosphere). This proves that as before his arrival, Chekhov’s approach to theatre was relevant to Lithuania after his departure. Yet, just like in the early 1930s, the rest of the decade saw another failure of the press and the government to assess the needs of the State Theatre accurately. Taking the refusal to finance the Youths as an example, the authorities have now failed to nurture the creative potential of the new generation of actors and directors. After all, the State Theatre was ‘generously financed’ by

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<sup>288</sup> “Dėl Vaidybinio Sovietizmo ir Orijentalizmo: Apdūmojimai „Dédės Tomo Lūšnelės” Pasižiūrėjus.” *Naujoji Romuva* 26 Nov. 1933: 943 (annual volume). Print. [“About the Sovietism and Orientalism of Acting: Thoughts on “Uncle Tom’s Cabin” Performance.”]

<sup>289</sup> A. Kr. “Dramos Sezoną Atidarant.” *Lietuvos Aidas*, 14 Sept. 1935: 5. Print. [“The Opening of the Drama Season.”]

<sup>290</sup> J. Keliuotis. “[ Naujajį Teatrą.” *Naujoji Romuva* 17 Oct. 1937: 777 – 781 (annual volume). Print. [“Towards the New Theatre.”]

the government in the 1930s.<sup>291</sup> This support was not utilised in the development of new talents but instead invested in the artistically mediocre productions of State Theatre veteran Borisas Dauguvietis, the only director left permanently employed at the theatre. Aleksaitė notes that once Chekhov and Oleka-Žilinskas have departed, the work of older directors, such as Dauguvietis and Antanas Sutkus, was compared to their conceptual approach, but mostly to negative effect.<sup>292</sup> The older directors, set in conventions of the realist traditions, failed to adapt to the new and desired standards of actor training and directing. While the traditionalists were happy to regain their ground, the dissatisfaction with them was increasingly spreading among the new generation of theatre professionals. This ‘conflicting, heated atmosphere’ in the theatre was illustrated in the press and the actors’ opinions,<sup>293</sup> year after year throughout what can be termed as the decade of disorientation. The institution was seen to be outcasting its audience and deferring from its role as a cultural representation of the nation. To this effect, Oleka-Žilinskas was convinced that ‘[t]here are two different things: Lithuania and the State Theatre.’<sup>294</sup> Theatre being one of the central cultural drives in Russia as well as in the Eastern Europe, the Lithuanian national theatre failed in its conscientious duty to cater to the best interests of its society. After the departure of their teachers, the students, now uprising professionals, were struggling to continue in the path set out for them because the State Theatre management was reluctant to employ them. Juknevičius, for example, started his professional directing career at the Klaipėda National Theatre because he was initially refused employment in Kaunas, where Dauguvietis was left to be the only full-time director. Similarly, young director Juozas Miltinis, having returned from his studies at the studio of the renowned French theatre innovator Charles Dullin in Paris, was also denied employment at the State Theatre.

The lack of direction that drove the State Theatre into despair replete with intrigues and self-profiteering was overturned by the emergence of the new socialist ideology of the Russian occupiers. Pre-determined by the Molotov-

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<sup>291</sup> Aleksaitė. “Režisūros Problemos.” *Girdzijauskaitė 2*: 32.

<sup>292</sup> *Ibidem* 24 – 32.

<sup>293</sup> *Ibidem* 26.

<sup>294</sup> Oleka-Žilinskas quoted in “Kymantaitės laiškas Algirdui Jakševičiui.” 29 Nov. 1935 MS. Eil. Nr. 212, A370/3, archive of Algirdas Jakševičius, LMTMC, 2. [“Kymantaitė’s letter to Algirdas Jakševičius.”]

Ribbentrop Pact in 1939, in which Lithuania was assigned to the Soviet sphere of influence, the takeover by the Communist Red Army was officiated in 1940. Even though after Germany's assault against Stalin in 1941 Lithuania was ruled by the Nazis, in 1944 it was recaptured by the Soviets. This period witnessed a violent suppression of the nationalists, and by 1945 the whole of Lithuania was engulfed, politically and culturally, by the Soviet values. The press were given a set of ideas to preach, while the theatres were busy staging these ideas. Now that the cultural matters were subordinated to socialist doctrine by the government agents overlooking the development of arts in the country, the free modernisations of early 1930s were looked upon positively by the press. The theatre historian, and a former student of Jakševičius, Jurgis Blekaitis, suggests that even though the reform was rejected at the time, it 'strengthened the Lithuanian culture considerably'.<sup>295</sup> He asserts that while the actors' creativity was stamped out by the traditionalists, the theatre was 'divided within' as the young actors, 'mostly those who grew up in Oleka-Žilinskas's traditions', separated themselves by their striving for 'fresh air'. One of them, Romualdas Juknevičius, now answered to the promise of an imminent socialist revolution by officially initiating the national theatre reform.

### ROMUALDAS JUKNEVIČIUS

Born in St Petersburg in 1906, Juknevičius grew up in Lithuania and Russia. He first displayed his acting and directing talent at Oleka-Žilinskas's Drama Studio, where he studied between 1929 and 1932, and spent the following two years at the Youth Theatre. After he left the Youths in 1934, Juknevičius went to Moscow to study the socialist realist methods of Maksim Gorky, becoming one of the first Lithuanian artists to work with this approach. He was also taken on as a trainee director by Vsevolod Meyerhold. In independent Lithuania, Soviet artistic methods were seen as socialist propaganda by the press and other artists, and Juknevičius initially experienced hostility akin to Chekhov's Kaunas experience. His long-time

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<sup>295</sup> "Valstybinio Dramos Teatro Sukakties Proga." *Vilniaus Balsas* 22 Dec. 1940: 5. Print. ["On the Occasion of the National Drama Theatre Anniversary." *Voice of Vilnius*].

friend and colleague Juozas Grybauskas speaks of the ‘reactionaries’ who, encouraged by Juknevičius’s studies in the USSR, labelled him a ‘Moscow agent’.<sup>296</sup> However, the latter’s inclination towards the Russian culture of the time proved vital when Lithuania became occupied by the Soviets. In October 1940, Juknevičius became the initiator and director of the first National Theatre of the Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republic in the capital Vilnius (restored to Lithuania from Poland by the Soviets in 1939). He also led the Higher Acting Studio of the theatre.

A common view persists in Lithuania that Chekhov had a ‘great’ influence on Juknevičius’s acting.<sup>297</sup> And like Chekhov, Juknevičius was not content with just acting, and proceeded to spread the awareness of social and cultural role of theatre as a director and a teacher. Already in 1933 he addressed fellow students asking the key question ‘what does theatre mean to us?’, persevering that by studying drama their function becomes ‘to learn and to work.’<sup>298</sup> Recalling the views of Stanislavski and Chekhov, Juknevičius believed that actors were no longer limited to their appearance onstage, but were expected to be active and conscientious in regard to other aspects of theatre art. In fact, the amount of actors who turned directors from the 1932 alumni of Oleka-Žilinskas and Chekhov’s class illustrates a passion for directing that was inspired by their innovative methodologies and productions. Quite a few of the students (apart from Juknevičius and Jakševičius also Juozas Grybauskas, Juozas Gustaitis, Kazimiera Kymantaitė) exchanged acting for directing. Also, Aleksaitė lists other actors, such as Vladas Fedotas-Sipavičius, Kazys Juršys, Kazys Jurašūnas and Lukošius (who was also involved in the Youth Theatre), who have directed two or more plays between 1935 and 1940. She suggests that they were probably inspired by the ‘impressive’ directing of Oleka-Žilinskas,<sup>299</sup> and no doubt of Chekhov. Of course, the above actors were presented with a possibility to direct because the only official director

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<sup>296</sup> Aleksandras Guobys. “Lietuvos TSR nusipelnęs meno veikėjas Romualdas Juknevičius. 1906.10.18 - 1963.04.13.” 1986 TS. Eil. Nr. 793, A196, archive of Juknevičius, LMTMC. [“An Accomplished Lithuanian SSR Artist Romualdas Juknevičius...”]

<sup>297</sup> „Milžino Paunksmėje.“ *Lietuvos Žinios* 4 May 1934: 2. Print. [“*In the Shadow of a Giant.*”]; Lukošius quoted by G. Aleksienė. “Sveikinu su Amžinybe!” *Kultūros Barai* 10 1966. Print. [“Happy Eternity!”]

<sup>298</sup> “Kas mums yra teatras?”. 28 Jan. 1933 MS. From a collection of Juknevičius’s letters and talks, Eil. Nr. 937, A196, archive of Juknevičius, LMTMC, 2. [“What does theatre mean to us?”]

<sup>299</sup> Aleksaitė. “Režisūros Problemos.” *Girdzijauskaitė* 2: 18.



at the State Theatre, Dauguvietis, was away, leaving the theatre in desperate need of replacement directors. While the theatre ought to have welcomed the new trained directors for permanent employment, such as Juknevičius and Algirdas Jakševičius, the aspiring artists had to struggle against the current of reluctance from the theatre. The historian of Lithuanian scenography, Audronė Girdzijauskaitė, suggests that the biggest paradox of the second half of the 1930s is indeed the fact that during this period of generational change the State Theatre found no room in its development for the most talented students of Oleka-Žilinskas and Chekhov, Juknevičius and Jakševičius.<sup>300</sup>

From the very beginning of their careers, both young artists adapted the techniques studied at the Drama Studio. Juknevičius appreciated the importance of theatrical *atmosphere* as taught by Chekhov, and presented the concept in one of his classes at the Vilnius Higher Acting Studio as the ‘justification of theatre.’<sup>301</sup> Chekhov’s influence on Juknevičius’s methodology is also clear when it comes to actors’ physical training. As discussed in Chapter 1, rhythm was utilised for its spiritual quality and its ability to instinctively permeate the actor’s body. Juknevičius also adapted rhythm for this purpose; in fact, notes from one of his classes at the Vilnius Higher Acting Studio describe an inner energy exercise that is directly lifted from Chekhov’s classes in Kaunas, which involved a ‘play with balls in groups to foster adroitness.’<sup>302</sup> Most of all, however, rhythm was used at Juknevičius’s Studio as a means for the actors to psychologically experience reality, a function that Stanislavski, rather than Chekhov, was concerned with. In the later class notes from the regional Žemaičių Theatre he refers to a ‘rhythm during a hot day in the village’,<sup>303</sup> which draws on the naturalistic truthfulness of everyday life. In Lithuania, realism was the politically justified convention in the arts at the time, and even though Juknevičius’s notes refer to Chekhov

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<sup>300</sup> Girdzijauskaitė 2: “Scenografija.” 146.

<sup>301</sup> “Vaidybos Studijos Dokumentacija.” 1941 MS. Eil. Nr. 620, A196/299, archive of Juknevičius, LMTMC, 2. [“Documentation of the Vilnius Higher Acting Studio.”]

<sup>302</sup> Ibidem 1; during one of his classes, Chekhov tells the students to sense the inner energy within them, cease movement and allow the inner energy to continue flowing. In this state, they are to throw the ball to each other, taking care that they control it, not it controls them. ‘(...) остановите тело, но пусть **внутри** вас течет (...) энергия. Играйте в этом состоянии в мячи. Но пусть мяч вами не руководит, вы мячом.’ Chekhov, *Uroki Mikhaila Chekhova* 9 – 10 (6 – 7).

<sup>303</sup> “Vilniaus Dramos Teatro Visuomeninės Veiklos Užrašai.” 1946 MS. Eil. Nr. 603, A 196/236, archive of Juknevičius, LMTMC, 3. [“The Notes from the Public Activity of the Vilnius Drama Theatre.”]

occasionally, Stanislavski's psychotechnique prevailed. In fact, Aleksaitė suggests that Juknevičius's strength as a director showed precisely through his acute (and intrinsically Stanislavskian) 'psychological analysis' of the plays.<sup>304</sup>

For Stanislavski, the ability to understand and experience the natural processes was akin to presenting the truth onstage; for others who digressed from the System truth remained the fundamental condition that belied their acting techniques. Juknevičius propagated the same artistic ideal, advancing the Lithuanian theatre further away from the intrigues, self-profiteering and pretence in the actors' expressions as outlined in Chapter 2. Truth for Juknevičius was inseparable from nature and he taught his students that '[w]e must be as truthful and natural onstage as we are in life.'<sup>305</sup> On the occasion of Juknevičius's death in 1963, his colleague and friend Grybauskas recalled his '[p]assionate fight for the truth in the art of theatre, for the progressive humanitarian and ideological theatre.'<sup>306</sup> Grybauskas's words draw on the context of Juknevičius's work at the Vilnius National Theatre, where during the years of repeated occupations he led a drama class, maintained his ensemble and strived to produce plays to the highest artistic standards despite censorship imposed by the Soviets and the Germans. The journalist J. Šimkus recalls a wide-spread opinion that dominated during and after Juknevičius's career, stating that he was a 'talented student of Stanislavski'.<sup>307</sup> For Juknevičius, like for Chekhov and Vakhtangov, Stanislavski's ideas first and foremost represented a conscientious theatrical ideal, not a dogma of rules and regulations.

To achieve his artistic and managerial ambitions in forming the Vilnius National Theatre, Juknevičius utilised the enforced cultural reforms of the Soviet authorities. He looked forward to a brand new artistic establishment where, after studying abroad and struggling for acceptance in Kaunas, Juknevičius could teach and direct. The Communists provided the plan with the financial support, and even though the artists had to adhere to the state ideology, they eagerly

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<sup>304</sup> Aleksaitė. "Režisūros Problemos." *Girdzijauskaitė* 2: 67 – 74.

<sup>305</sup> "Stojamųjų egzaminų eigos užrašai." 11 Sept. 1945 MS. Eil. Nr. 622, A196/301, archive of Juknevičius, LMTMC, 4. ["LSR Vilnius National Drama Theatre's acting studio course of entry exams."]

<sup>306</sup> "Romualdas Juknevičius: Skaudus Praradimas." 1963 MS. Eil. Nr. 757, A1064/2, archive of Juozas Grybauskas, LMTMC, 1 – 2. ["Romualdas Juknevičius: A Painful Loss."]

<sup>307</sup> J. Šimkus. "Hejermano „Viltis“ Vilniuje." *Tarybų Lietuva*, 8 Oct. 1940: 10. Print. ["Hejerman's *The Good Hope* in Vilnius." *Soviet Lithuania*]

commenced on building their own - to use Chekhov's words - theatre of the future. The Kaunas troupe was split into two, and, headed by Juknevičius, the actors (mostly those from the Youth Theatre)<sup>308</sup> started work on their new establishment. In the programme for the opening of the National Theatre in Vilnius on 6 October 1940 the director of the theatre assumed the ideological role in the following declaration: 'leaning on the Lenin-Stalin idea today we bravely step forward towards the brighter future of our theatre'.<sup>309</sup> Despite Chekhov's own apolitical stand, Juknevičius's striving for Lithuanian SSR's own theatre of the future echoes the former's ambition revealed to him as a student in 1932. Having been forced into the socialist propaganda, Juknevičius promptly employed it to promote and validate his artistic ideals, that were themselves rooted artistic ideology not concerned with politics.

This was best symbolised in 1936, when Juknevičius debuted as a director with one of the most successful plays in Lithuania in that decade, Herman Heijerman's *The Good Hope* (fig. 16, below). The socialist realist play presents a stark image of a Dutch fishing community and the challenges that await them all when the decaying ship, after which the play is named, sets out on a dangerous voyage to sea. It was, in the words of *Kultūra* magazine journalist, 'the first production that displayed social injustice' of a working class community.<sup>310</sup> The audience identified with the realistically presented characters who were struggling against their unjustifiable fate and suffering. Lithuanian theatre historians suggested that it was 'one of the most significant plays of that time' in which Juknevičius managed, true to the socialist message of the play, to unite the actors of different schools.<sup>311</sup> Students of Glinskis and Sutkus, who taught in the 1920s, and those from the 1930s drama classes of Dauguvietis and Oleka-Žilinskas worked in harmony under Juknevičius's direction.

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<sup>308</sup> "Teatro direktoriaus Juškos įsakymas apie Vilniaus dramos trupės padalijimą." 17 Jan. 1940 TS. Ap. 2, 101, archive of the National Drama Theatre, NLALA, 5 – 6. ["The announcement of theatre director Juška regarding the division of the National theatre drama troupe."]

<sup>309</sup> Jurgis Blekaitis. "Valstybinio Dramos Teatro Sukakties Proga." *Vilniaus Balsas*; Juknevičius. "Įsikuriant." From the programme for *The Good Hope* production in Vilnius. "Vilniaus Dramos teatras. Leidinėlis – teatro atidarymas." 1940 TP. Eil. Nr. 391, A192/16, archive of Juknevičius, LMTMC, 7. ["Settling In."]

<sup>310</sup> Juragis. "Valstybinio Teatro Dvidešimtmetis." *Kultūra* 11-12 1940: 655 (annual volume). Print. ["Twentieth Anniversary of the State Theatre."]

<sup>311</sup> Rasa Vasinauskaitė and Irena Aleksaitė. "Valstybės Teatro Klaipėdos Skyrius." *Girdzijauskaitė* 2: 82, 125. ["Klaipėda Division of the State Theatre."]

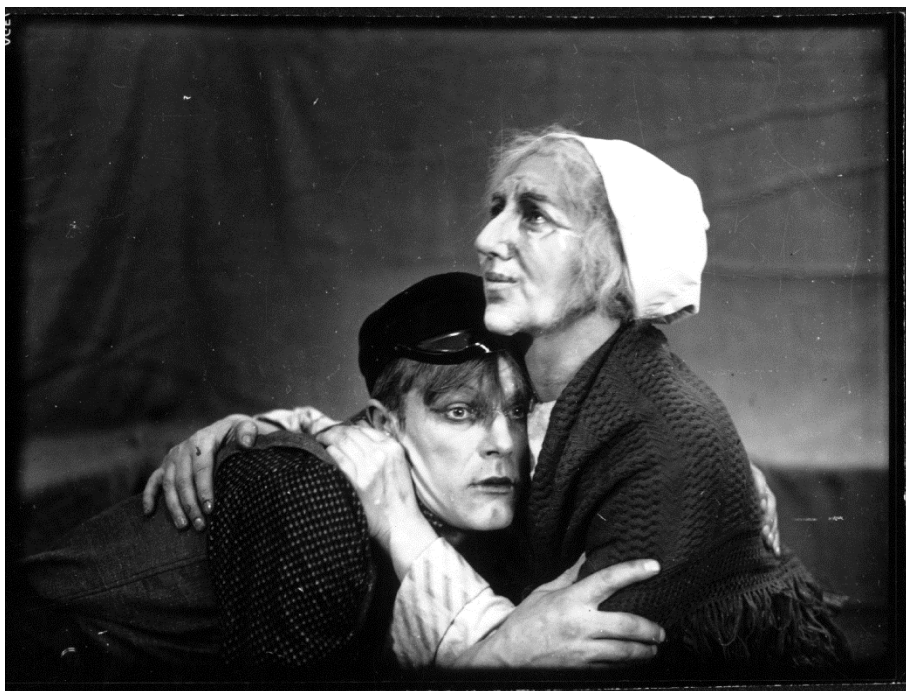


Figure 16.

Juknevičius chose to revive *The Good Hope* for the official opening of the socialist National Vilnius Theatre. Even more than it did in 1936, this production stood as a direct metaphor for the hope of new directions on the national stage, so much so that the ship was incorporated into the emblem of the theatre, used to this day.<sup>312</sup> In the production, celebrating the strength of a community and its joint efforts to overcome hardships of poverty and loss, the director utilised the predominant theatre ethics conceived by Stanislavski and taught by Chekhov. Along with truthfulness in the actors' feelings and expressions, the creation of a strong ensemble was one of Juknevičius's central goals. It remained so throughout his career as a teacher and director. In his 1945-1946 notes from the Vilnius Drama theatre, he lists the actors as sharing the roles of supervising everyday affairs, such as the functioning of the cloakroom, housekeeping and make-up for the performances.<sup>313</sup> These collective efforts mirror the onstage and offstage responsibilities the actors were given by the teacher Tortsov in Stanislavski's *An Actor Prepares*, and recall Chekhov's group exercises in Kaunas that predominantly

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<sup>312</sup> See top left corner of the website for the National Lithuanian Drama Theatre (former Vilnius National Theatre) in <http://www.teatras.lt/>. The ship also appears on the house curtains in the main auditorium of the theatre.

<sup>313</sup> "R. Juknevičiaus užrašai darbo Vilniaus Teatre metu." 1945 – 1946 MS. Eil. Nr. 597, A196/229, archive of Juknevičius, LMTMC, O. ["Juknevičius's Notes during his Work at the Vilnius National Theatre."]

focused on establishing an ensemble out of the actors.<sup>314</sup> It was the well-integrated ensemble led by Juknevičius who had renovated and decorated a deserted building that became the Vilnius National Theatre. While the Soviet occupation controlled the cultural reforms in Lithuania, it was the ideals presented in the classes of Oleka-Žilinskas and Chekhov (ensemble, theatre of the future and truthfulness) that remained at the core of the Vilnius National Theatre activities.

However, despite his success with *The Good Hope* productions and his applauded efforts in the formation of the new Vilnius theatre, Juknevičius's comical efforts offended some viewers. In April 1940, he went back to the Kaunas State Theatre and produced the contemporary satire play *Topaze* by Marcel Pagnol, which was also shown in Vilnius later that year. The play tells the story of how an idealistic and somewhat naïve school teacher gets corrupted by his desire for money. Some viewers and critics considered it a 'vulgar comedy', and representing opposite values that the theatre of moral idealism ought to stand for.<sup>315</sup> Nevertheless, the fact that none of the greedy and fallen characters in the play are punished, what would be considered a reassuring and happy ending, was seen by some reviewers as a revelation to the audiences. Again echoing Oleka-Žilinskas's views on conscientious society, the comedy represented to some that the only people who can sort their society out are those who are responsible for its faults, i.e. the society itself.<sup>316</sup> Unfortunately, like with the grotesque style of Chekhov's Kaunas production of *The Government Inspector*, Juknevičius's satire was met with hostility because the characters were exaggerated rather than naturalistic. While the production itself was made in a realistic and 'at times naturalistic' style, the actors tended to add their own 'displeasing' interpretations of the roles, complained the director Juozas Miltinis.<sup>317</sup> He was dissatisfied that

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<sup>314</sup> Stanislavski produced a scenario in which the teacher character Tortsov encourages his students to contribute to the running of a theatre, see *An Actor's Work*, 552 – 578; during his classes and productions, Chekhov had well communicated ensemble at the very core of his exercises and staging, see Chapters 1 and 2.

<sup>315</sup> S. Leskaitis. "M. Pagnolio „Topazas“." *Lietuvos Aidas* 5 Apr. 1940: 5. Print. ["*Topaze* by M. Pagnol."]; A. Rūkas remarks that some people were unhappy with the choice of the play, summing up the desired treatment of vice in plays to be acceptable as long as the ending of the production features a strong 'moral conclusion of the play', such as the punishment of those who have sinned. "Dramos Prabudimas ir Konstruktyvus Kriticizmas." *Kultūra* 4 1940: 283 (annual volume). Print. ["The Awakening and Constructive Criticism of Drama."]

<sup>316</sup> Rūkas. "Dramos Prabudimas ir Konstruktyvus Kriticizmas." *Kultūra* 4 1940: 284.

<sup>317</sup> "Topazas Kauno Valstybės Teatre." *Naujoji Romuva* 28 Apr. 1940: 359 – 360 (annual volume). Print. ["*Topaze* at the Kaunas State Theatre."]

Henrikas Kačinskas, the actor playing the protagonist private school teacher Albert Topaze, was a 'nincompoop' rather than a believable refined representation of someone who is well-educated. Even though since the early 1930s the drama critics have displayed increasing abilities for professional, constructive criticism, their preference was clearly set on naturalistic style of acting and production.

Considering the unstable political climate of Lithuania at the time, Juknevičius's other and equally important claim to Stanislavski's - and his descendants' - ideals was the awareness of the role of theatre in the contemporary society. Directing during the unstable pre-war years and during the war, he made efforts to present the plays that would most appeal to the audiences of the day, and provide hope and reassurance at the same time. Recalling Chekhov's concern for contemporary society when producing the ambitious and victorious *Hamlet*, Juknevičius also used his productions as a force through which the ensemble of the actors could directly approach the viewers and communicate to them the most urgent issues of the day. He utilised the optimistic symbolism of *The Good Hope* (translated reassuringly as *Hope*), warned the society of a real-life lurking threat in *Topaze*, and in 1941, during the war years, staged Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House*, accentuating the play's comments on repression, sacrifice and personal freedom.

In his approach to acting and directing, Juknevičius was indeed a true student of the Stanislavski System. Having been familiarised with it during the classes of Oleka-Žilinskas and Chekhov in Kaunas, the artist deepened his knowledge and understanding of this technique throughout his career. In working according to a strict, systematic method, Juknevičius advanced the Lithuanian theatre forward, even if the enforced political ideology overshadowed the originality of his work ethic. He understood that both Stanislavski and Chekhov, despite maintaining opposition in the methodological sense, stood for the same ideals in theatre. To complement his Stanislavskian approach to acting and production, Juknevičius utilised Chekhov's techniques particularly rich in ethical values, such as performance-validating *atmosphere* and strong sense of ensemble. Both Juknevičius and Jakševičius have inherited from their Drama classes in Kaunas a strong sense of morals that permeated their choice of productions and their educative contribution to the development of theatre. Jakševičius in particular

carried on Chekhov's conscientious mission to publicly outline and challenge the contemporary issues of theatre arts.

### ALGIRDAS JAKŠEVIČIUS

Algirdas Jakševičius was born in the district of Panevėžys, North Lithuania, in 1908. After studying sculpture and law he became a member of the Kaunas State Theatre Drama Studio, Oleka-Žilinskas's and later Chekhov's class, and was later employed at the theatre as an actor. Like Juknevičius, he participated in the activities of the Youth Theatre. In 1935 and 1936 Jakševičius studied in Moscow at the Vakhtangov Theatre, and in America (at the Drama department at the University of New York), where he was invited and mentored by Oleka-Žilinskas. After his return to Kaunas, Jakševičius organised a drama studio, and later taught at the University of Vilnius. In 1938, he was the first to translate into Lithuanian and publish Stanislavski's *An Actor Prepares*,<sup>318</sup> making the System readily available both for theatre professionals and those seeking to familiarise themselves with the world-famous doctrine. Even though he died in 1941 at a young age of 33, he has written a vast amount of articles and speeches, which display his energy in determining the artistic ideals and role of theatre. Jakševičius was, above all, concerned with developing a new acting method for the Lithuanian actors. Similarly to Chekhov, and to other First Studio innovators, his every step was permeated with constant search and ambitions to discover new possibilities in the art of expression.

Like Juknevičius, Jakševičius embraced Stanislavski's System, taught at the State Theatre Drama class. During his lecture on an actor's technique at the Vilnius University Theatre Studio he proudly referred to himself as a 'student of Stanislavski by proxy'.<sup>319</sup> However, he clarified that for him the System, as Stanislavski had intended, forms the basis for further search and interpretations.

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<sup>318</sup> The contract and cover letter for his translation are kept at LMTMC, archive of Jakševičius, Eil. Nr. 98 and 99, A532/1, 2.

<sup>319</sup> Lecture titled "Vidujinė Aktoriaus Technika." N.d. MS. Eil. Nr. 291, A557, archive of Jakševičius, LMTMC, 15. ["The Inner Technique of an Actor."]

Jakševičius explained that the material for the above lecture comes from various sources, such as the Vakhtangov Theatre and the MAT, Meyerhold's rehearsals (which he attended in Moscow), from Stanislavski's *An Actor Prepares*, and from the classes of Oleka-Žilinskas and Chekhov at the Kaunas Drama Studio. Jakševičius resembles the artistic spirit of the First Studio nonconformists, such as Vakhtangov and Chekhov when he states: 'I am searching for a synthesis of various, sometimes opposing to each other, questions concerning the art of theatre, which should guide me in my work'.<sup>320</sup> This in particular echoes Vakhtangov's Fantastic Realism and the belief that the ideal lies in a synthesis of the content of Stanislavski's experiencing and the theatrical form such as that in Meyerhold's biomechanics. Jakševičius utilised various techniques in order to develop his own interpretation of what constitutes the art of theatre. This was a direct response to Chekhov's pursuit of the ideal theatre of the future, which stood at the basis for all his techniques presented in Kaunas.

When considering Jakševičius's methodology, Chekhov influenced his interpretation of the System on a larger extent than that of Juknevičius. During his discussion of intuition, Jakševičius declares it to be of 'colossal importance',<sup>321</sup> particularly referring to its subconscious qualities. He reinstates the importance of Chekhov's schemes of creation and the concept of artistic attention when he discusses the actor's crucial ability to be able to accept the intuition's "unclear whispers", recalling Chekhov's description of the world of images communicated to the actor. Jakševičius accepted Stanislavski's ideal concerning the important role of intuition in the art of the actor, but instead of utilising it by employing logic, as in the System, he developed it according to Chekhov's spiritual approach. During the Hours of Mastery (classes organised by Jakševičius in 1937 for his fellow actors), he underlines the importance of fantasy and the instinctive 'improvisational state' for eliminating clichés from acting.<sup>322</sup> By allowing space for the development of the actor's form in particular, Jakševičius here refers to improvisation according to the subconscious laws of intuition, a Chekhovian state

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<sup>320</sup> Ibidem 1 – 2.

<sup>321</sup> Ibidem 10 – 11. See Chapter 1 for references to Chekhov's theory on artistic attention.

<sup>322</sup> "Algirdo Jakševičiaus Vedamų Meistriškumo Valandėlių Kauno Dramos Teatre Užrašai." 1938? MS. Eil. Nr. 283, A454, archive of Jakševičius, LMTMC, 4 – 5. ["Notes from the Hours of Mastery, led by Algirdas Jakševičius at the Kaunas State Theatre."]



where the actor can abandon his/her consciousness and submit their body to inner impulses. In his artistic approach, he took a stand against the rigidity of acting techniques and theories; instead, he vouched to get closer to his own idea of the theatre of the future by interpreting and utilising the most relevant findings of theatrical innovators.

In order to do this, Jakševičius applied the condition that was widely regarded at that time to be the core of theatre arts, the ensemble. Reminding of Chekhov's efforts to counter the lack of trained actors by firstly forming them into a collective unit in his Kaunas productions, Jakševičius presents ensemble as the foremost concern of the director. '[T]heater is a collective, collaborative art', he states, informing that a 'belief of today's greatest theatre professionals [is that] the biggest concern of the director is a collective execution of the production.'<sup>323</sup> Jakševičius coordinated his ensemble by applying Chekhov's theatrical *atmosphere*, one of the latter's most distinctive artistic legacies in Lithuania. Like his teacher wrote in the lecture sent to the Drama Studio students after his departure, *atmosphere* for Jakševičius also represented the soul of the production. In his article "Searching for the Principle of a Production" he describes his goal in directing a play accordingly as 'turning a lifeless project into a living body and soul.'<sup>324</sup> Referring to the public as a 'director with many heads', Jakševičius emphasises the importance of permeating the atmosphere of the production with a 'scenic truth'.<sup>325</sup> Alluding specifically to the sincerity of performance rather than an authentic representation of reality, Jakševičius here implies that genuine experiencing and expressions of the actors would achieve the audience's emotional involvement. Their participation would thus maintain a specific atmosphere in the auditorium, which would 'direct' and inspire the actors (like a director, as introduced to Lithuania by the First Studio visitors, must do). One of the major conditions for the System and its branches (such as the methods of Chekhov and Vakhtangov), truthfulness in performance was inspired in Jakševičius, like in Juknevičius, in Oleka-Žilinskas and Chekhov's classes. In his regard to the public

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<sup>323</sup> "Vidujinė Aktoriaus Technika", archive of Jakševičius, LMTMC, 7.; "Režisieriui-Mėgėjui", archive of Jakševičius, LMTMC, 3. ["To the Amateur Director."]

<sup>324</sup> "Pastatymo Principo Beiškant." N.d. TS. Eil. Nr. 296, A514, archive of Jakševičius, LMTMC, 4. ["Looking for the Principle of a Production."]

<sup>325</sup> "Režisieriui-Mėgėjui", archive of Jakševičius, LMTMC, 3.; "Pastatymo Principo Beiškant", archive of Jakševičius, LMTMC, 3 – 4.

as an active participant in the all-important atmosphere of the production, Jakševičius was advancing on the common Lithuanian standards of isolating the audience as those who merely *view*.

As a director, Jakševičius was significantly inclined towards theatricality, which at the time in Lithuania was a novel approach (hence the critics' mixed reactions to the playful form of Chekhov's *Twelfth Night* production). He believed that composition, captivating images and thoughts, and the form of acting were the three main concerns of the director.<sup>326</sup> While all three, especially the concern for composition, were extensively explored in Chekhov's group exercises in Kaunas, Jakševičius developed them further on the basis of Meyerhold's and Vakhtangov's definition of theatricality. For Vakhtangov, the theatricality of an actor's bodily form is as important as psychological processes; while for Meyerhold true theatricality connotes a complete 'schematisation' within a discipline of rhythm and of the actors' bodies and movements.<sup>327</sup> Jakševičius incorporated this level of physical and spatial awareness in the style of his productions. The theatricality in acting and the all-encompassing atmosphere of Jakševičius's first production (Eugene O'Neill's *Marco's Millions*, discussed below) signalled to some historians that theatre 'has again become an art, which educates the culture of the viewer by aesthetical means and affects his/her emotions.'<sup>328</sup> Jakševičius, like Juknevičius, became a direct continuation of the actor-director-pedagogue-researcher ethos embodied by such masters of stage as Stanislavski, Vakhtangov, Chekhov and Oleka-Žilinskas among others.

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<sup>326</sup> "Pastatymo Principo Beiškant", archive of Jakševičius, LMTMC, 4.

<sup>327</sup> See Vakhtangov's discussion of Fantastic (Imaginative) Realism in Malaev-Babel 128 – 133; and Meyerhold, "The Mousetrap scene from 'The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark' (pantomime)" in Braun 150 – 151.

<sup>328</sup> Blekaitis 284.



Figure 17.

The occupation in 1940 put Jakševičius under pressure to direct specifically Soviet plays, such as Vladimir Bill-Belotserkovsky's drama *Life is Calling* which tells a story about a heroic and predictable male Soviet scientist. However, with his debut (and only) production of Eugene O'Neill's *Marco's Millions* in 1938, the director developed a 'plastic, rhythmic acting', which determined him to represent, in the words of Aleksaitė, 'a perspective course towards theatricality in Lithuanian directing'.<sup>329</sup> The play, staged at the Kaunas State Theatre, retells a voyage of the Venecian explorer Marco Polo. As a symbol of materialist new world, he is faced with philosophical dilemmas evoked by the spirituality of exotic China and its peoples. Aleksaitė suggests that this production draws on the 'exotic form' of Vakhtangov's theatrical production of Carlo Gozzi's *Princess Turandot*,<sup>330</sup> which Jakševičius would have seen during his time in Moscow. The elaborate Eastern stage decorations (see fig. 17, above) brought about criticism from the theatre management, who claimed there was no space or financing to produce various platforms and objects.<sup>331</sup> Unstoppable, however, Jakševičius persisted, and despite having the production delayed by half a year, he finished it nevertheless. The critics who were mainly negative towards the young director's

<sup>329</sup> Aleksaitė. "Režisūros Problemos." Girdzijauskaitė 2: 66.

<sup>330</sup> Ibidem 60.

<sup>331</sup> Blekaitis 234.

decision to stylise the actors according to the Eastern setting rather than maintain a realistic approach, challenged the acting: '[w]hy use those (...) poses and gestures from *Princess Turandot*? There it is Commedia-del-arte, but here it's realism, even if it is poetically expressionistic.'<sup>332</sup> The journalist summarises the actors' expressions as 'dramatic', 'showboating' and having a 'tone of declamation'. This supports the idea that with his first production, like in his lectures and numerous press articles, Jakševičius was challenging the superficial realism, or as some theatre historians refer to it, the 'pseudorealism' that had corrupted the Lithuanian stage.<sup>333</sup> The expressionistic style that the above criticisms of the acting refer to was not, however, unanimously misunderstood. D. Padegimas of the *Kultūra* magazine remarks that it was the incapability of the majority of the actors to carry out the tasks posed by the play and by the director that made Jakševičius's production appear at times uncoordinated and superficial.<sup>334</sup> Indeed, this was also the fate of Chekhov's ambitions in developing a demanding standard of the actors' form in the *Twelfth Night* in Kaunas. Padegimas observes that with *Marco's Millions* 'a new thought was breathed into our theatre', declaring that the production was one of a kind, with 'new and bright intentions, new efforts.' Aleksaitė believes that it was the conceptual, theory-based directing that Jakševičius inherited from Oleka-Žilinskas and Chekhov that gave him the space for the 'artistic searches that were (...) inspired by' his two teachers.<sup>335</sup>

In fact, the circumstances surrounding *Marco's Millions* strongly echoes Chekhov's concern for the theatre's social role. Declaring that the play had been chosen due to the 'needs of the audience' Jakševičius selected for the spectators a play full of spiritual issues, such as the reminder that richness lies not in money, but in the soul of a person.<sup>336</sup> The director believed that theatre is only valid when it 'intensely' affects the viewer,<sup>337</sup> i.e. when the audience relate to and

<sup>332</sup> Miltinis. "Pastabos dėl Marko Milijonų Pastatymo ir Vaidybos." *Naujoji Romuva* 08 Jan. 1939: 17. Print. ["Comments about the Production of and Acting in *Marco's Millions*."]

<sup>333</sup> Aleksaitė. "Režisūros Problemos." *Girdzijauskaitė* 2: 60.

<sup>334</sup> D. Padegimas. "Teatralinės Pabiros." *Kultūra* 11 1938: 742 (annual volume). Print. ["Theatrical Spills."]

<sup>335</sup> Aleksaitė. "Režisūros Problemos." *Girdzijauskaitė* 2: 61.

<sup>336</sup> "Režisierius Alg. Jakševičius apie "Marko Milijonus"." *Lietuvos Aidas* 30 Sept. 1938: 5. Print. ["Director A. Jakševičius on *Marco's Millions*."]

<sup>337</sup> "Dramos Sezono Apžvalga ir Teatro Linkmė", a draft for an article, 1935 MS. Eil. Nr. 280, A448/1, archive of Jakševičius, LMTMC, 4. ["Review of the Drama Season and the Direction of Theatre."]

share the experiences of those on the stage. Jakševičius inherited Chekhov's belief that for an art to move forward, towards its future, it must move with the times (see Chapter 2, discussion of *Hamlet*). In his speech on the method and discipline of actors, for example, the young director declares that an actor 'expresses the epoch'.<sup>338</sup> More than any other director in Lithuania at the time, Jakševičius was determined to establish theatre as an active part of the society.

Recalling the state of theatre Oleka-Žilinskas and Chekhov saw in Lithuania when they arrived, Jakševičius also believed that it is still in need of those drastic reforms, not wholly implicated by the First Studio innovators. Like his former teachers, he also did not limit the need to change to internal artistic issues at theatre establishments. Speaking in 1940 at the History of Theatre department at the University of Vilnius, Jakševičius refers to the vital importance that theatre plays in a cultured society, but regrets 'how far away our [Lithuanian] theatre now is from performing that task'.<sup>339</sup> He sums up the problem by stating that the fault is with the playwrights, who are indifferent to the theatrical tasks, with the public, who cannot 'tell black from white', and, most relevantly to this discussion, with the critics, who are not 'historically and theoretically prepared'. As a director and a teacher, Jakševičius's focus always remained on his country and her cultural development. As a result, in the words of Aleksaitė, his first and only production of *Marco's Millions* was so high in artistic standards, it alone showed 'what promising directors are now entering the Lithuanian stage'.<sup>340</sup> With the achievements of Jakševičius and Juknevičius, the struggling new generation of theatre professionals had officially taken their rightful place in the history of Lithuanian theatre.

In addition to Juknevičius and Jakševičius, the actor Henrikas Kačinskas was particularly influenced by the reforms of Oleka-Žilinskas and Chekhov. Having played Malvolio in Chekhov's production of *The Twelfth Night* and sharing the role of Khlestakhov with Viktoras Dineika in *The Government Inspector*, Kačinskas was favoured and inspired by Chekhov in his acting method. Indeed, Aleksaitė notes,

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<sup>338</sup> „Kelias į Teatrą.“ (Aktorius Vaidmuo Teatre).“ N.d. MS. Eil. Nr. 293, A448/5, archive of Jakševičius, LMTMC, 1. [“A Way to Theatre.” (The Role of the Actor in Theatre).”].

<sup>339</sup> “Pranešimas Universiteto Teatro Istorijos Katedroje.” 1940? TS. Eil. Nr. 306, A492, archive of Jakševičius, LMTMC, 2. [“An Announcement at the Theatre History Department of the University.”]

<sup>340</sup> Aleksaitė. “Režisūros Problemos.” *Girdzijauskaitė* 2: 64.

Chekhov provided Kačinskas with his own 'brightest roles that he created at the MAT.'<sup>341</sup> A former student of Antanas Sutkus, Kačinskas was capable of tackling a wide variety of roles because of his 'exceptional acting talent, art of transformation, a rare feel for the style and form.'<sup>342</sup> During Chekhov's experimental productions, the actor eagerly took on the new approach, and set an example to other young actors (students of the Drama Studio). In fact, the director Juozas Miltinis, speaking of Kačinskas's role in Juknevičius's *Marco's Millions*, declared him to be 'the pride of our drama. This actor really develops his roles by inner experiencing.'<sup>343</sup> The success of Stanislavski, his ideas and those that branched out of his System, was illustrated in the few, but very much memorable, figures of the Lithuanian theatre. The System has remained, in the form of various interpretations and additions, the official actor training method in Lithuania to this day.

During his stay in Lithuania, Chekhov revealed the theatrical and methodological possibilities that encouraged his students to search for new artistic ideals and techniques. He succeeded in following Oleka-Žilinskas's goal to bring Stanislavski's System to Kaunas, and in doing so with his own methodology he illustrated that the theory is validated by further research and experimentations. The search for the Theatre of the Future, initiated by Chekhov, was successfully continued in Lithuania by Juknevičius and Jakševičius. At present, the Drama department at the University of Klaipėda includes modules of Chekhov's technique in teaching the future actors and directors. It appears that together with Chekhov's articles on theatre, published by the Lithuanian press before and after his visit to Kaunas, this fact points to his last relevance to the country's artistic direction.

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<sup>341</sup> Ibidem 44.

<sup>342</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>343</sup> Miltinis. "Pastabos dėl Marko Milijonų Pastatymo ir Vaidybos." *Naujoji Romuva* 8 Jan. 1939: 17.

## CONCLUSION

Having investigated a period of Chekhov's life virtually ignored by English scholars, I managed to put Chekhov's method, as it is known today, into a certain perspective. The common view that Chekhov's work in Europe, prior to going to America and England, was mere 'wandering' was disproved. By concentrating on his years abroad that are not investigated by Western scholars, the vital period of Chekhov's artistic development was investigated. These theatre historians and writers, such as Chamberlain and Gordon, overstep Chekhov's activities in Baltic States, resulting in a gap that denies the artist the credit of contributing to two countries' theatre pedagogy and production standards. In illustrating his efforts in Lithuania, where in the early 1930s a theatrical reform was at the centre of cultural affairs, the argument had placed Chekhov in the context not usually associated with his name. While Chekhov's experts treat his method of actor training as innovative and practical for actors, in Kaunas he was in fact made to take on the role of an artistic revolutionary. It is in this spirit that he maintained the ambition for the theatre of the future, and driven by it taught in considerably more liberal conditions in America and England.

The author of the most incisive book on Chekhov's years abroad, Byckling, has already written on his curriculum and productions in Lithuania and Latvia. The discussion has contributed to this effort by the featured investigation of Chekhov's role in Lithuania entrusted to him by Oleka-Žilinskas. Having included a significant amount of opinions and dispositions of the Lithuanian press, the role the political circumstances played in Chekhov's artistic decisions in his three productions was conveyed. Seeing the invite to teach and direct in Lithuania as an opportunity to develop his method, Chekhov at the same time had to handle his role as a reformer of the national theatre. The way he chose to direct the plays, and, most of all, the curriculum he presented to the Lithuanian actors, were confirmed to be a direct reply to the expectations put to Chekhov. Throughout the argument it was illustrated how his artistic choices and demands on the actors were deemed

threatening to the Lithuanian ideology, and therefore widely discarded almost to the effect of a national campaign against Chekhov.

This angle also contributes to the Lithuanian scholarship, such as the most recent publication on Lithuania's theatre history, edited by Girdzijauskaitė, which largely concentrates on the production values of Chekhov's three Kaunas plays. Fitting to the conclusions reached in Chapter 3, in this volume, the historian Judelevičius suggests that 'Chekhov's contribution to the development of Lithuanian theatre is very important.'<sup>344</sup> However, he comes to this conclusion without elaborating a link between the achievements of Chekhov's classes and the artistic success of his productions. Chekhov's curriculum is mentioned briefly, as a background for the performances, but is not discussed in detail, overlooking an important part of Chekhov's role at the State Theatre. Most historians, such as Byckling, doubt his directing abilities, and, like Knebel', concentrate on his acting career. In contrast, the findings presented in the first and second chapters of this thesis are proof that Chekhov's inclination to theory and teaching and his philosophical and spiritual searches helped him to direct three wholesome productions. These were shown to be not only original in their interpretation and style, but specifically adapted to the Eastern European setting. Considering that theatre in Russia and Eastern Europe was and is at the very centre of national culture, Chekhov proved to be aware of the responsibilities involved by his approach to directing, which was intertwined with ethical and social concerns. Like with his productions, in his classes he wanted nothing less than to implicate a change, that promised nothing less than, in his own words, a 'new theatre'.

While the Anglophone scholarship ignores Chekhov's methodology in the Baltic States, Byckling pioneers in giving a relatively brief analysis of his classes. During the investigation of his techniques, featured in the first sixteen classes in Kaunas, Chekhov's artistic influences were clearly established. His method was confirmed to be one that digresses from Stanislavski, while at the same time illustrating the wide-spread view of scholars that the two artists were in fact reaching for the same ideals. By separating what was considered to be Chekhov's two chief artistic and personal influences, the school of Stanislavski and that of

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<sup>344</sup> Judelevičius. "Michailo Čechovo Režisūra Valstybės Teatre." Girdzijauskaitė 1: 175.



Steiner, the stepping stones in Chekhov's persistent search for the theatre of the future were revealed. While the theatre ideals Chekhov aspired to were, in accordance to the dominant view of the critics, rooted in the teaching of Stanislavski and his disciples (such as Vakhtangov), it was Steiner's philosophy that underlined the formation of and motivation behind most of Chekhov's techniques. Considering Chekhov's circumstances prior to arriving to the Baltic States, the curriculum he presented in Riga and Kaunas was the first time he trained actors in the method associated with his name now. As mentioned earlier, due to Soviet censorship Chekhov could not explore Steiner's philosophy fully until he left Russia. What he taught actors at his home studio, the First Studio or the subsequent Second Moscow Art Theatre was either what he had 'lived through' from Vakhtangov and Leopold Sulerzhitsky's interpretation of Stanislavski, or his own developing method, which however was still at the experimental stage.<sup>345</sup> Not having had the possibility to create the drama school he dreamed of in Czechoslovakia, Germany and France, Chekhov took a first step towards his goal in Latvia in Lithuania. He formalised the use of the anthroposophical view on creation for the first time in his drama classes in Riga and Kaunas, laying the groundwork for his future success as a teacher and theoretician in Great Britain and America.

The structure I applied to my investigation was meant to reinforce a view that Chekhov's methodology was highly relevant to Lithuanian culture even in the years following his departure. This was proved in the discussion of two of his former students. From the analysis of personal notes, class notes, speeches, articles and interviews of Romualdas Juknevičius and Algirdas Jakševičius, the affinity of the two artists to theatre ideals propagated first by Stanislavski, and then developed by his students such as Vakhtangov and Chekhov was revealed. Oleka-Žilinskas's ambition to incorporate Stanislavski's System to the training of Lithuanian actors was therefore successful. Seeing the System as a sphere for further research and interpretation, Oleka-Žilinskas invited Chekhov because he maintained the same view. When discussing artistic development of Juknevičius

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<sup>345</sup> 'Я преподавал то, что сам пережил от общения со Станиславским, что передали мне Сулержицкий и Вахтангов.' Chekhov 1: "Put' Aktera." 99; 'Наши репетиции [во Втором Московском Художественном театре] (...) носили характер экспериментов больше, чем профессиональной работы'. Chekhov 1: "Zhizn' i Vstrechi." 205.

and Jakševičius, the Lithuanian scholars remark on the positive influences the Drama Studio classes had on the artists. So far, however, there has not been a publication specifically on Chekhov's legacy in Lithuanian theatre. The present investigation met difficulties in this sense because both Juknevičius and Jakševičius were well-travelled and maintained a superior knowledge of the current theatrical events and methods. It was therefore impossible to acknowledge direct influences when it came to discussing their inclination to Stanislavski's System, encountered by them in Kaunas and abroad. Instead, relying on the presence of some of Chekhov's techniques in the methods of Juknevičius and Jakševičius, I concluded that his approach was not only relevant to the Lithuanian theatre artists at the time; it has also been developed further by their own searching, ambition and strong sense of ethics. During his time in Kaunas, Chekhov without a doubt contributed to the development of Lithuanian theatre.

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## APPENDIX

The following poem, here translated from Lithuanian, was written by Kazys Inčiūra. The Lithuanian poet and cultural figure graduated from the State Theatre's Drama Studio (the class of Antanas Sutkus) in 1930. During Chekhov's stay in Kaunas, Inčiūra studied at the University of Kaunas, and the two artists did not work together on any of Chekhov's three Kaunas productions. The following poem was printed on 27 January 1933, when Chekhov was still working in Lithuania, in a Kaunas newspaper *Dienos Naujienos* (*The Daily News*). In April 1937, it was reprinted in Russian in *Baltiĭskiĭ Al'manakh* (*The Baltic Anthology*), a magazine that was at that time published in Kaunas and was dedicated to the current cultural trends and events of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia.

The original Lithuanian version is kept at the LMTMC, archive of Chekhov, P.Č.-2, eil. Nr. 55, APM72/2. The published Lithuanian version can be found on the online database of old newspapers and magazines, at [www.epaveldas.lt](http://www.epaveldas.lt). The published Russian version is kept at the Department of Rare Books and Manuscripts, National Library of Lithuania, Vilnius, archive of Mstislav Dobuzhinsky, F30, Ap 2, nr. 97.

### TO MICHAEL CHEKHOV

Kazys Inčiūra

*Creator! Incarnated with amazing visions  
on the enchanted wings of fantasy  
You bring us the precious gifts  
of the Sun Queen and Your genius.  
Awakened by the light, our hearts rouse  
and in merry skiffs swim to the sea.*

*You have found the spring, full of beauty.  
You have found the beam of life,  
and from rainbows You weave the colourful worlds-  
of graceful passion, suffering and merriment.  
And how can one thank You for all that,  
for the wonderful tale of Your magic?*

*Now we flutter in the spellbound heavens,  
the hearts having blossomed with God's flowers,-  
For the precious art song of Your soul  
the heart pays back with song as well:  
Like we do our blossoming fields - lets love  
Art and its prophet Misha Chekhov!*